

2017

An examination of front-line student services staff's experience transitioning from a traditional to an integrated model of student service

Christopher David Bowser
Iowa State University

Follow this and additional works at: <https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd>



Part of the [Higher Education Administration Commons](#), and the [Higher Education and Teaching Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Bowser, Christopher David, "An examination of front-line student services staff's experience transitioning from a traditional to an integrated model of student service" (2017). *Graduate Theses and Dissertations*. 16076.
<https://lib.dr.iastate.edu/etd/16076>

This Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Iowa State University Capstones, Theses and Dissertations at Iowa State University Digital Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in Graduate Theses and Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Iowa State University Digital Repository. For more information, please contact digirep@iastate.edu.

**An examination of front-line student services staff's experience transitioning
from a traditional to an integrated model of student service**

by

Christopher David Bowser

A dissertation submitted to the graduate faculty
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major: Education (Education Leadership)

Program of Study Committee:

Lorenzo D. Baber, Major Professor
Larry H. Ebbers
Carol A. Heaverlo
Joel D. Johnson
Korey K. Kollasch

The student author, whose presentation of the scholarship herein was approved by the program of study committee, is solely responsible for the content of this dissertation. The Graduate College will ensure this dissertation is globally accessible and will not permit alterations after a degree is conferred.

Iowa State University

Ames, Iowa

2017

DEDICATION

To

my loving wife

Jaimie Janelle

who has supported and loved me
every step of the way during this journey;

my children

Annaliese and Emerson

who inspire me to strive for greatness daily;

my parents

Dave and Mariellyn

who raised me to work hard
and taught me to have a passion
for whatever I wanted to pursue in life;

my friend

Freddy Miranda

a larger-than-life inspiration
guiding me to live my life with joy in my heart; and
an anonymous college administrator
who questioned my academic ability
yet became a source of motivation throughout this journey.

Thank you!

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
LIST OF FIGURES	vi
LIST OF TABLES	vii
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	viii
ABSTRACT	xi
CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION	1
Background	1
Problem	9
Purpose of the Study	10
Research Questions	11
Methodology	11
Significance	12
Delimitations	13
Limitations	14
Definition of Terms	14
Overview of the Dissertation	16
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW	18
Traditional Model of Student Services	20
Integrated Model of Student Services	21
Higher Education as a Competitive Business	23
Student as customer	26
Importance of customer service in an integrated model of student services	30
Conceptual Framework - Schlossberg's Theory of Transition	34
Moving out	35
Moving in	35
Moving through	36
Utility of Schlossberg's Theory	36
Summary	38
CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN	40
Purpose of the Study	40
Research Questions	40
Methodology	41
Qualitative approach	41
Philosophical foundation	45
Institutional context	45

Population and sample	45
Urban Community College	46
Border Community College	47
Prairie Horizon College	48
Riverview University	49
Lakeview Liberal Arts College	50
Methods of Data Collection	51
Purposeful sampling	51
Personal documents	52
Interviews	53
Observations	55
Documents	57
Methods of Data Analysis	57
Criteria for Goodness and Trustworthiness	60
Delimitations	62
Limitations	63
Researcher Positionality	63
Summary	63
CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANTS	66
Overview of the Participants	66
Participant Descriptions	67
Case One: Tina	67
Case Two: Jill	68
Case Three: Jenny	69
Case Four: Amanda	70
Case Five: Tammie	71
Case Six: Karla	72
Case Seven: Marlene	73
Case Eight: Shelle	75
Case Nine: Bianca	76
Case Ten: Martha	77
Case Eleven: Bill	78
Case Twelve: Freddy	79
Case Thirteen: Matt	80
Case Fourteen: Juanita	81
Case Fifteen: Ranae	82
Case Sixteen: Jackie	83
Case Seventeen: Scott	83
Case Eighteen: Kylie	84
Case Nineteen: Renessa	85
Case Twenty: Noah	86
Observations by the Participants	87
Summary	88

CHAPTER 5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS	89
Themes	89
Summary of the Study	82
Theme One: “We want to improve, but we don’t want to change”–Moving Out to Transition	90
Pattern One: Staff Frustrated with Current Model.....	91
Pattern Two: Mixed Feelings about Announcement	94
Pattern Three: Fear of the Unknown.....	100
Theme Two: Processing Announcement of Transition - Moving In	104
Pattern One: Reasons for Transition	105
Pattern Two: Strategies for Training.....	111
Pattern Three: Culture of Care.....	117
Theme Three: Fitting into a New Professional Role – Moving Through	120
Pattern One: It Takes Time to Develop Trust.....	121
Pattern Two: Front-line Staff Experience Growth during Transition.....	124
Pattern Three: Continuum of Service	126
Summary	131
CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS	132
Summary of the Study	132
Conclusions	132
Conceptual Framework	145
Implications for Practice	148
Recommendations for Future Research	151
Reflection	154
REFERENCES	157
APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT	163
APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE	166
APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATION	167
APPENDIX D. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL.....	173

LIST OF TABLES

	Page
Table 3.1. Institutional context	48
Table 4.1. Participant information	88

LIST OF FIGURES

	Page
Figure 6.1.	146

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

It is hard to know where to begin in expressing my gratitude as I complete my doctoral studies. Thanks to all who have been a part of this journey. Dr. Larry Ebbers has been more than a professor; he recruited me to the program while I was employed at Kirkwood Community College and participating in the CLIC program. He has been a mentor and provided guidance while traveling through the program at Iowa State University. He advised me, along with many other doctoral candidates, to avoid making job changes during the journey to earn a PhD. That was a tremendous piece of advice. However, I ignored him and changed twice. Nevertheless, he was right because the changes made it much more difficult to complete this process. Finally, he kept me focused on the completion of the degree and always to keep an eye on the future.

After the retirement of Dr. Ebbers, I was required to replace him as my Major Professor. I am eternally grateful that Dr. Lorenzo Baber accepted my invitation to lead my committee. Dr. Baber found a way to re-energize my research after I accepted a new position at Indian Hills Community College that had initially pulled me away from my studies. He has been more than willing to share his thoughts about my research topic, and assisted in keeping me on track during this past year. An added bonus is his passion for the Chicago Cubs.

Dr. Carol Heaverlo, hands down, is the best faculty member with whom I have ever had the pleasure to take a class. She taught qualitative research with a passion. Dr. Heaverlo made learning enjoyable and did a masterful job of adapting her teaching style to accommodate the students and the material. I would look forward all week to Thursday night classes on the garden level of Lagomarcino Hall. In addition to the classroom experience, she offered timely and helpful advice on both my capstone and dissertation.

When I asked Dr. Joel Johnson to serve on my committee, I was excited about his background in college student services. His expertise in this area has added value to my work.

Dr. Kristie Fisher inspired me to begin this journey. When I started working in her division at Kirkwood as the Enrollment Services Manager, I was constantly amazed at her perspective on providing a high level of customer service to students. She inspired me to be a better community college administrator. I have said many times that when I grow up, I want to be Kristie Fisher. She is a tremendous role model for many colleagues at Kirkwood and beyond.

There are always those people in our lives whom we consider our partners in crime. I was lucky enough to find two such partners in the community college cohort: Freddy Miranda and Deb McConahie. These two made the journey so much more enjoyable.

Finally, the people for whom I am most grateful and appreciative are my family members. First, thank you to my parents who worked hard to support me through my undergraduate years as a first-generation college student. They also continued to support my decision to earn both my masters and doctoral degrees.

Second, I thank my daughters, Annaliese and Emerson, who have watched patiently as their father has spent countless hours attending class and working on homework. They have been understanding as I have locked myself away for days at a time to finish an assignment, read, or work on this dissertation research. They are definitely my biggest fans and I hope my example encourages them to pursue their passion when they have the opportunity.

Finally, I am especially grateful to my wife Jaimie who has attended sporting events, music performances, and school conferences by herself. I am thankful she has supported my desire to engage in this journey to develop as a community college administrator and researcher. I am very much looking forward to spending more time with her and having her call me Dr. Bowser when she asks for me to complete projects around the house. Dr. Bowser will definitely help with laundry.

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this qualitative comparative case study was to understand how front-line student services staff experience transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model of service. There were three fundamental questions framing this research study:

1. What strategies and support systems were utilized by staff making the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model of student service?
2. In what ways did staff perceive the control they had over their changing role during the transition?
3. How did the reorganization impact issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and service quality?

Twenty participants from three 2-year community colleges and two 4-year private, liberal arts institutions took part in the study. The colleges and participants were given pseudonyms. Participants completed a written reflection and were involved in a series of three interviews. Following the data analysis, three themes emerged from the data: Namely, all participants (a) desire to improve, but don't want to change; (b) need opportunities to process announcements of transition; and (c) need time to find how they fit into new professional roles. Three emerging themes supported by nine patterns depict the lived experiences of front-line staff making the journey from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research are also given.

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background

College students work with front-line student services staff on a daily basis completing thousands of transactions. Front-line student services staff are responsible for assisting in the navigation of processes needed by students to apply for and receive financial aid, register for classes, understand their bill, and make payments to the institution. When colleges make the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model, have front-line student services staff experienced training and support to prepare them for the rigors of serving the college student population? Preparing staff for the transition to the integrated model can have a direct impact on the quality of service that students receive.

Historically, campuses have arranged student services departments in hierarchical, compartmentalized, vertical structures of functional areas that make sense from an administrative perspective (Havarnek & Brodwin, 1999). A traditional model of student service has been described in the literature as a functional “silo” (Manning, Kinzie, & Schuh, 2014). Students are required to take many steps and endure waiting in multiple lines to navigate related services such as registration, billing, and financial aid. Early higher education student affairs units were generally integrated as part of the academic organizational structure of institutions. Like many administrative structures throughout the college, they were bureaucratic and hierarchical in their structures (Tull, Kuk, & Dalpes, 2015).

The traditional model of student service provides fragmented services from departments staffed by narrowly focused and highly specialized professionals (Nealon, 2005). Integrated models of student services, molded after the banking industry and

pioneered by the University of Delaware in 1992, were conceived as a means to manage student services in a more efficient and cost-effective model while reducing student and parent run-around (Lonabocker, 2006).

The impetus for a more efficient model of student services can be attributed to several factors. First, funding for higher education was at a 25-year low (Kelderman, 2012). Second, colleges were looking for innovative strategies to create efficiencies in student services departments. Next, students and parents were becoming savvy consumers of higher education and expected a level of service quality, and had become accustomed to retail settings, from their colleges. In other words, they expected higher education to offer the same conveniences and staff assistance (Sinsabaugh, 2007) they experienced in other consumer transactions. In an attempt to improve the student experience and cope with the reality of declining budgets, institutions of higher education developed integrated models of student services where students can access multiple services in one location.

Finally, student services administrators began viewing current and prospective students as customers. The “student as customer” phrase began to appear in research and scholarly journals around the turn of the century in American higher education. (Fisher, 2009). Every stakeholder in higher education (e.g., students, government, professional bodies) has a particular view of quality depending on their specific needs. (Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007). Scott (1999) explored the concept of the “student as customer” and noted that the student plays the role of the consumer in the higher education marketplace. Just as taking good care of customers typically results in increased profitability for businesses, higher education institutions that seek to attract and retain their customers (i.e. students) would also be well served to treat their customers well (Boyd, 2012). Higher education

would be wise to assemble takeaways from the experiences of other professional service providers regarding quality service. The quality and availability of student services influence the decision students make to stay or leave (Ackerman & Schirbrowsky, 2007). Taking care of customers should lead to increased retention, which is an increasingly important revenue source for higher education institutions. In an effort to continue to attract and retain students, institutions recognize the student experience as an important factor (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Small, 2008). This can potentially place a large amount of pressure on front-line student services staff that are tasked with providing a high level of service quality to students and parents as they navigate the required steps within the admissions process, class registration, applying for financial aid, paying their bills, and accessing their academic record.

The intent of student affairs has always been to connect people who need help with people who care (Chambers, 1987). Inadequate attention has been given to the personnel that are tasked with delivering quality customer service to students and their parents at community colleges. By simply understanding student expectations, Scott (1999) argued that institutions of higher education can better meet the desires of the student. Commenting about the relationship of students and their likelihood to remain enrolled at an institution of higher education, Bejou (2005) stated, “The longer these ongoing transactions are satisfactory to both parties, the longer the relationship will endure, to the benefit of everyone” (p. 1).

When employing the services of a doctor or an attorney, the general public does not necessarily know if they are receiving high quality health care or high quality legal advice. However, customers often determine the quality of service and their satisfaction by way of secondary measures; such as the way phone calls are answered or the bedside manner of a

physician. Scott encouraged academics to embrace the topic of customer service in higher education rather than dismiss it (Fisher, 2009). In an attempt to improve the student experience and cope with the reality of declining budgets, institutions of higher education have developed integrated models of student services where students can access many services in one location.

The institutions of higher education in this study made the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services. Much like the participants, each of the institutions have been provided a pseudonym for the purpose of this study. The following paragraphs provide background information into student service issues identified on each campus. In addition, information is shared that explains the initial stages of transition to an integrated model.

Urban Community College made the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services for several reasons. The college was struggling to provide quality service to students due to cumbersome and non-intuitive processes (Bowser, 2011). While the services of financial aid, enrollment services and the business office (including the cashier) were co-located in one physical space, students still needed to stand in line three separate times to complete transactions with each office. The time to wait for each office approached more than an hour during peak service times and many students were frustrated with the process. In addition, there seemed to be a lack of connectivity between the Business Office, Enrollment Services, and Financial Aid. For example, if a student asked a question about dropping a class while in line for financial aid, they would be given the correct information about how that drop would impact their financial aid, but could not be assisted with dropping the class. The student would have to exit the

financial aid line and then go stand in the back of the enrollment services line to conduct that next step in the process. Finally, there was a lack of overall understanding in how to navigate the processes in these offices by both students and staff. The college decided to assign existing staff from several offices within the student services division and cross-train them to create a new integrated model of student services (Bowser, 2011). The staff experienced a rigorous training program, while at the same time, serving students in the traditional model of student service.

Similarly, Prairie Horizon College made the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services for several reasons. The changing demographics of the college's district led Prairie Horizon to shape a student-focused strategic direction. To help support this direction, the college secured funding for a new student services building with a One Stop as the focal point. The college wanted to create "high-touch" student experiences, remove "silo" structures and centralize services into one physical space. In addition, the institution hoped to eliminate the "run-around" for students, reduce lines and wait times, removes barriers and obstacles to enrollment transactions, communicate with a greater sense of care and timeliness as well as improve back-end processing operations. The services of the Registrar, Financial Aid and the Business Office were not located in the same building, and students would have to wait in three separate lines to complete transactions and move from line to line to conduct the next step in an enrollment process as staff were not cross-trained. There were also over seven different phone lines and email addresses for students to contact when they needed assistance from these areas as well as other areas in Enrollment Services. The college decided to move existing positions from different areas in Enrollment Services to the One Stop when vacancies occurred. This

provided opportunities for the college to promote existing staff and cross-train them under a new integrated model. As part of the training program while the physical space for the new One Stop was being created, staff spent time in each of the traditional areas of Registrar, Financial Aid and Business Office.

Border Community College did not initially set out to create an integrated model of student services. The administration planned to remodel a building housing the offices of financial aid, admissions, registration, testing center, and the business office. During the remodel of the physical spaces, the planning team began conversations about merging the front-line services to create an integrated student service or “one stop” enrollment center. The planning team believed that transitioning to an integrated model would allow them to address long wait time and disconnected services in multiple offices during periods of high student traffic. As a result of the planning team visualizing a transformation in service methodology, a project that began as a simple remodel of physical space concluded in the creation of a student services center that integrated financial aid, admissions, registration, testing, and business office operations. As a part of the transition, front-line staff were retrained to be able to serve students in all of the functional areas of the new model of service. Border Community College front-line staff are now charged with assisting students with financial aid, admissions, registration, career, and transfer planning. The renovated space provided a proximity to the business office that improves staff communication and collaboration. While the front-line staff focused on serving the students with customer service questions in all of the functional areas of the integrated model, back-office financial aid staff were able to focus on processing of student files without interruption. The result was faster processing of financial aid, shorter wait periods, and more integrated enrollment management processes.

Riverview University made the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model for several reasons. The university was growing quickly and struggling to provide quality service to students due to overlapping and cumbersome processes. While the services of financial aid, records and registration, and student accounts were located in the same building, students still needed to stand in line three separate times to complete transactions with each office. The time to wait for each office approached more than an hour during peak service times, and many students were frustrated with the process. In addition, there was a lack of connectivity between the financial aid, student accounts, and records and registration offices. For example, if a student asked a question about dropping a class while in line for financial aid, he/she would be given the correct information about how that drop would impact their financial aid, but could not be assisted with dropping the class. The student would have to exit the financial aid office, go down the hall, and stand in the back of the line in records and registration to physically drop the course. Finally, there was indifference from staff to understand the processes of other offices and how this impacted student satisfaction. With the urging of the financial aid director, the university made the decision to assign existing staff from the three offices within the enrollment management division and cross-train them to create a new integrated model of service. During the transition, the staff participated in a rigorous training program which included classroom training, job shadowing of experts from other offices and hands-on experiences with students under the supervision of experts from other offices within enrollment management. The outcome of the transition was a new center on campus where students could check-in and visit with one staff member who could assist with all transactions within the enrollment management division.

Lakeview Liberal Arts College had a vision of providing integrated student (one-stop) service to its approximately three thousand students attending its central location. The existing traditional model of registering students was extremely time consuming. Students began the process in the Office of the Registrar to gain academic clearance. The student would then travel to another building to be approved for financial clearance from the Student Accounts staff. If the student needed additional financial assistance, a third office became a part of the process. Finally, the student would travel to where the process began in the Office of the Registrar to finalize their enrollment. Information about the registration process was not shared between departments, making the process frustrating for students and staff alike.

The transition to an integrated model of student service took place over the course of several academic years. The initial step was to cross-train existing staff in the Student Accounts department. They began to become proficient in assisting students with financial aid in addition to their knowledge about the student bill. Ultimately, the ability to register students was added to their skill set which gave students the ability to complete the entire registration process in one location after planning their schedule with an academic advisor.

The transition to an integrated model of student service has enabled Lakeview Liberal Arts College to provide a higher quality of service to the students on their main campus with a consistent process where students can access all of the services needed in one location. After developing an integrated model on the central campus, Lakeview began to reorganize the service to satellite campus students. This population accessed registration, student account, and financial aid information by phone, email, and online chat services. Those systems were restructured so that remote students could access the same cross-trained integrated student services professionals being utilized by the students attending the central

campus. Distance learning students were now able to complete these transactions in one interaction over the phone, through e-mail, or online chat services. The product of the transition to an integrated model of student service is a staff of highly trained front-line professionals that are able to assist students through all of the transactions necessary to apply for and secure financial aid, register for classes, and have a clear understanding of their bill with the college.

How student affairs staff experience the transition of their student service model can potentially impact the quality of service that students receive. The phenomena of twenty individual staff members from five separate institutions of higher education transitioning from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services was the focus of this study.

Problem

There are three problems addressed in this study. First is a need to understand why institutions of higher education are transitioning from traditional to integrated models of student service. Second, there is a general lack of knowledge and research in the area of customer service in higher education. This problem is compounded by the lack of willingness to discuss or explore the topic (Scott, 1999). Scott questioned why the topic of customer service is shunned in academics and learned that academics' reluctance to embrace a "student as customer" perspective in higher education is related to the popular adage that the "customer is always right" (p. 194). The challenge to higher education is to examine and research the topic of customer service rather than dismissing it (Scott).

Third, student services departments have traditionally operated with minimal staff to serve large numbers of students. Lean staff focused on one area of the service process can lead to long lines and delays for students. This issue is magnified by growing enrollment and

the 24/7 expectations of current students (Taylor, 2006). With students demanding higher service quality, a premium is placed on training the front-line staff who provide services to the student customer in a timely fashion. Cross-training of staff hinges on the ability of the staff member to understand how processes from multiple departments in a traditional model of student services complement each other in an integrated model of student services.

Understanding where these processes mesh allows staff to offer high quality customer service (Bowser, 2011).

Student services have evolved in order to support the academic mission of institutions of higher education. The role of student services staff is to support and contribute to student learning (Winston, 2003). However, if we acknowledge that in addition to being learners, students are also consumers, institutions will need to re-examine the expectations in service quality that current students demand. This demand for quality places a large amount of stress on the individuals who are tasked with delivering service to students in an integrated model of student services. When proposing change in higher education, it is important to understand how staff experience transition as it relates to level of services that students receive. This study examined the strategies and support systems utilized by staff transitioning from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study was to describe the experiences of twenty front-line student services staff that transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services at five separate institutions of higher education. Front-line student services staff provide scholars assistance with the business of being a college student. This study is informed by Schlossberg's (1984) Theory of Transition.

The goal of this research was to better understand the strategies and support systems front-line student services staff utilized during the transition to an integrated model at their respective institutions. This research study will provide new insights into how front-line student services staff are impacted by workplace changes and how supervisors can better assist staff members in managing workplace transitions.

Research Questions

The central research question was: How do front-line student services staff experience the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services?

The auxiliary research questions were:

1. What strategies and support systems were utilized by staff making the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model of student service?
2. In what ways did staff perceive the control they had over their changing role during the transition?
3. How did the reorganization impact issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and service quality?

Methodology

To explore transition at these five institutions of higher education, a comparative (multi-case) case study was utilized. Student services divisions are far from uniform across multiple colleges and universities. To understand complex organizations, it is useful to carefully examine staff transitions at more than one location (Stake, 2006). A comparative case study affords an opportunity to explore how front-line student services staff individually adapt to role change within the context of an integrated student services center. This multi-case study is aimed at closely examining individual front-line student services staff at five separate institutions of higher education that have made the transition to an integrated model

of student service. Stake (1995, p. vi) stated that comparative case studies seek to understand better how the whole operates in different situations. Stake referred to the whole as a “quintain”. In this study, the quintain is the integrated model of student services. The unique experiences of the individual cases is interesting for what it can reveal about the quintain (Stake). Case study research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake).

Throughout the literature on case study research, several themes emerge. First, case study research assists in understanding a complex issue or adds depth to what is already known about a topic through previous research. The literature also shows this method is useful in examining modern-day, real-life situations and provides a platform for the application of new ideas (Stake, 1995).

Thick and rich descriptions are common in case study research. Merriam (2002) spoke about case study research as ...“an intensive description and analysis of a phenomenon or social unit such as an individual, group, institution, or community (p. 8). The opportunity to examine real-life situations in the field is what excites the researcher about this methodology as it relates to exploring how twenty front-line student services staff experience transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service.

Significance

At this time, limited literature exists examining the role of front-line student services professionals in higher education. The significance of this study heightens the awareness of administrators about how front-line student services staff are impacted by the different stages of transition. As college and university leaders seek to make the transition to an integrated

model of student services, this study provides a deeper understanding of front-line staff as they move through the transition to provide quality service to students in the new model of service.

The researcher believes this study has provided new insights into how front-line student services staff are impacted by planned transition and if they are well-trained and motivated to provide quality service to students. The study revealed that positive staff transition experiences have a direct impact on the service quality students receive. In addition, the results of this study can be used inform professional development opportunities for front-line student services staff in the future. The challenge for higher education is to examine and research the topic of customer service, rather than dismissing it (Scott, 1999). This study provides a much-needed contribution to the literature on the importance of front-line student services staff within institutions of higher education.

Delimitations

The study began with a list of 26 prospective participants. As the researcher began to examine the written reflections submitted by participants, it became clear that three prospects did not meet the criteria to participate in the study. Two of the potential participants were moved to the back office as a part of the reorganization to an integrated model at Border Community College. The other prospect began the transition to the integrated model in a supervisory position and not as a front-line student services professional at Border Community College. The next opportunity to delimit the study took place after the first round of interviews at Riverview College. During interviews it was determined that three of the potential participants worked in the back office in the traditional model and after the transition to an integrated model. Since the study aimed to examine the transition experiences of front-line staff, these prospects were removed from the study. The data collected from

prospective participants prior to their departure from the study were not used to generate findings. The reduction of these six prospects left twenty front-line student services staff remaining that made the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services.

Limitations

Limitations are present with the researcher in this study. Due to the nature of qualitative study, the risk exists for misinterpretation of the data. As a former employee of one of the colleges in the study, it was important not to impose the investigator's experiences on the research. Since the researcher is no longer an employee at that institution, it was important to bracket interpretations of cultural elements of what it means to be an employee of the institution. This was a challenging part of the study for the investigator. The researcher believes bracketing was successful, allowing the lived experiences of the participants to be the focus.

Definition of Terms

Throughout this phenomenological case study, the terms, *traditional model of student services*, *integrated model of student services*, *silos*, and *student as customer*, *service quality*, and *student services/student affairs* will be utilized.

A *traditional model of student services* arranges academic and student services departments in hierarchical, compartmentalized, vertical structures of functional areas that make sense from an administrative perspective (Havarnek & Brodwin, 1999).

An *integrated model of student services* is a centralized location that assists students with navigating the processes that are traditionally housed in separate offices (see student services) in an integrated, collaborative, student-centric, "student as customer" manner. Service is provided by comprehensively cross-trained student services staff with the ability to

answer a wide array of questions to serve student needs with a single point of contact. The one-stop model ensures that staff do not work in silos, that staff have a holistic perspective of how to address the needs of students, and equally important, that staff gain an understanding of the significant role they play in student retention (Ebberts & Rivera, 2015). The integrated model of student services is often referred to as a “one stop” student services center throughout the literature.

Silos are a term in student services used to describe the historical, hierarchical, fragmented, vertical arrangement of campus services. Each service department in this functionally based system seems to have its own set of practices, policies, and procedures that are not necessarily in sync with the overall service mission of the college (Sinsabaugh, 2007). Students are sent from office to office in order to have questions from related topics answered.

Front-line customer service staff are those who interact directly with customers or the public. Front-line student services staff are responsible for assisting in the navigation of processes needed by students to apply for and receive financial aid, register for classes, understand their bill, and make payments to the institution. Front-line customer service staff have clearly defined roles and receive a considerable amount of structured training when first employed (Robertson, 2003).

“Student as customer” is a concept that the student plays the role of the consumer in the higher education marketplace (Scott, 1999).

Service Quality stems from a comparison of what customers feel a company should offer (i.e., their expectations) with the company’s actual service performance (Lewis & Booms, 1983).

“Student services/student affairs” professionals are responsible for academic advising and support services (financial aid, student accounts, registration) delivery at colleges and universities in the United States and abroad. The division is an integral part of higher education system that seeks to serve the needs of the student. They are also responsible for incorporating professional values through campus activities, counseling and resources (McClellan, & Stringer, 2009). Good practices in student affairs include:

1. Engaging students in active learning.
2. Helping develop students’ coherent values and ethical standards.
3. Setting and communicating high expectations for student learning.
4. Using systematic enquiry to improve student and institutional performance.
5. Using resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.
6. Forging educational partnerships that advance student learning.
7. Building supportive and inclusive communities

Overview of the Dissertation

The dissertation is organized in six chapters. Chapter 1 provides an introduction and overview of the research study. In addition, the chapter speaks to the problem statement, research questions, the significance of the study, and the definition of key terms.

The purpose of Chapter 2 is to enable the reader to visualize the evolution of student services from the compartmentalized siloes of the traditional model to the collaborative setting of the integrated model. In addition, the chapter examines literature which discusses higher education as a marketplace focusing on the student as a customer where integration of resources is a means to attract and respond to students’ needs as well as an institutional response to efficiency. Next, Chapter 2 examines research that defines the role of the student services professional. Additionally, Chapter 2 reviews what the literature provides about the

comparative case study approach to collecting and analyzing the data for the purposes of this study. Finally, Chapter 2 examines literature on Schlossberg's Transition Theory that will be the conceptual framework to guide the study. The limited literature on the importance of student services staff within institutions of higher education also demonstrates the need for additional research in this important area that has not received adequate attention in higher education research.

Chapter 3 of this dissertation explores the methodology of a comparative case study and why that approach best suits the research. To obtain a deep and nuanced understanding, a qualitative comparative case study was conducted with twenty participants at five different institutions of higher education. This study used the concept of Schlossberg's Transition Theory to observe how front-line student services staff experience change moving from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model of student services. I also address the methods of data collection and analysis, researcher positionality, as well as the anticipated limitations and delimitations of the study.

Chapter 4 provides an overview of the cases, including participant profiles and observations from site visits and reflection writing samples. An analysis and discussion of findings are presented in Chapter 5, including the major themes which emerged from the research. Finally, Chapter 6 provides a discussion of outcomes of the study, implications for policy and practice, in addition to offering recommendations for further research.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this literature review is to enable the reader to envision how front-line student services staff navigate the transformation within student services divisions from the compartmentalized silos of the traditional model to the collaborative setting of the integrated model of student services. The chapter examines literature which discusses higher education as a competitive business that must be prepared to react to the growing expectations of students and parents for enhanced service quality in an environment of increasing college costs. The chapter also examines the topic of student as customer within the higher education marketplace. Additionally, the chapter inspects literature that focuses on the importance of customer service in an integrated model of student services. Finally, Chapter 2 examines literature on Schlossberg's Transition Theory that serves as the conceptual framework to guide the study.

This chapter demonstrates that a body of literature exists devoted to the history of the traditional model of student services describing how institutions have been organized according to function, with departments created around a particular transaction or task. These tasks have been divided into compartmentalized departments with vertical structures (silos) that make sense to institutions, but may create difficulties in accessing service for the students asked to navigate these processes. In addition, the literature examines the concept of developing an integrated model of student services, including why colleges adapt this model to improve the quality of service for students and parents.

The researcher gathered materials recommended by faculty and other practitioners familiar with the topic. A comprehensive Iowa State University Library search was conducted to identify relevant articles and dissertations using the following databases:

ABI/INFORM Complete, Academic OneFile, Academic Search Complete, Academic Search Premier, Dissertation Abstracts, Education Full Text, ERIC, Google Scholar, and ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global.

Several recent doctoral dissertations have been presented on the integrated model of student services. Javaheripour (2009) conducted a study that described the process of developing, implementing, and evaluating an integrated student services center. Warmann (2015) added to the literature about integrated models of student service by researching how generalists (front-line student services staff) function as a community of practice in a community college one-stop student (integrated model) service center. Finally, Johannes (2012) conducted research to discover student experiences in an integrated student service delivery environment. However, it appears that a gap exists in the research. Currently, there does not appear to be any published research on the importance of front-line student services staff in an integrated model of service. The support and resources that front-line student services staff receive during the transition to an integrated model could be instrumental in the quality of service they are able to provide for students, impacting the perceived success of the integrated model of service to stakeholders.

The chapter concludes with a review of the paucity of literature related to how student services staff experience transition from a traditional model of services to an integrated model of student services. Keywords are: traditional model of student services, integrated model of student services, one-stop student services, student as customer, transition theory, customer service, higher education, student affairs, student service, enrollment services, customer service, and community college.

Traditional Model of Student Services

Historically, campuses have arranged student services departments in hierarchical, compartmentalized, vertical structures of functional areas that make sense from an administrative perspective (Havranek & Brodwin, 1999). In other words, institutions have been organized according to function, with departments and units created around a particular transaction or task. This antiquated model provides fragmented services from departments staffed by narrowly focused and highly specialized professionals (Nealon, 2005). The emphasis in department-driven structures is more focused on the internal policies, constraints, and problems of the department than they are on serving students (Brenders, Hope, and Ninnan, 1999). This type of administrative structure is referred to as a “silo” in higher education. Silos in higher education reflect that the functions are organized with the process, not the student as the priority (Owen & Pekala, 2003).

Like a silo next to a farmer’s barn, an organizational silo has rigid boundaries that define a department’s duties and responsibilities (Claus, 2007). This departmental structure seems logical administratively because dedicating staff to a single process allows them to specialize in the skill and become experts in the task at hand. The creation of silos that often compete for resources and attention is a natural byproduct. This silo model requires the student to have an understanding of the structure before being able to utilize the service (Nealon, 2007).

In addition to being difficult for students to navigate, functional silos often have different administrative reporting lines that hinder creation of a common vision for integrated service delivery. Kleinman (1999) described the silo organization as having the following characteristics: cumbersome paper-intensive processes; lack of clear communication between

offices; and lacking a high degree of customer service. From a student perspective, however, these tiered structures, divisions and staff responsibilities are irrelevant (Nealon, 2005).

Since departments in traditional models of service conduct little if any cross-training, students have to shuttle among departments to accomplish even the simplest tasks (Nealon, 2007). In Beede and Burnett (1999), case studies revealed common themes related to student service delivery across multiple organizational boundaries: processes are overly controlled, complicated, punitive, fragmented, bureaucratic, inconvenient, labor intensive, and inconsistent. When new students arrive on campus, they confront a complex aggregation of offices and practices. Many processes, such as advising, have not been fundamentally altered in 50 or even 100 years, even as colleges serve a rising generation of students who find Snapchat and Amazon more intuitive than email or a course catalog (Gardner, 2016). As institutions closely examine their infrastructures, it has become evident that current models are increasingly administratively complex and not student-centric (Beede & Burnett, 1999). Institutions that recognize the complexity of their functional silos will look to transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services to improve the overall experiences of students outside of the classroom.

Integrated Model of Student Services

Movement from a traditional to an integrated student services model is an organizational trend originating from government and business (Ousley, 2003). All student groups are arriving on campus with more needs than previous generations (Gardner, 2016). Mission statements from multiple integrated student services models emphasize student enrollment, educational planning, and personal accountability through intentional activities in a supportive environment (Warmann, 2015). Integrated student services, modeled after the banking industry and pioneered by the University of Delaware in 1992, were developed as a

means to manage the services provided to college students in a more efficient and cost-effective model while reducing student and parent run-around (Lonabocker, 2006).

Eliminating functional silos through physical relocation of services and focusing on teamwork, quality service, and new technology, the University of Delaware launched a revolutionary model for student service delivery. (Johannes, 2012). However, physical relocation alone is not enough for the creation of an integrated model of student services. What is important is that the re-organization of services actually helps students (Draeger, 2008).

The goal for an integrated student services center is to provide seamless, integrated services for registration/enrollment, financial aid, and student accounts/billing through phone, in-person, e-mail, and online interactions (Selander, 2014). The emphasis for integrated student services is on a system of services that are connected, collaborative, comprehensive, and horizontally organized, using the student-centric view (Kramer, 2003, p. xi). Kramer further indicated that only recently have longtime independent services (registrar, registration, orientation, advising, admission) begun to organize as a system of services with a focus on student needs and customer convenience. The services offered in an integrated model facilitate different student needs, including students' enrollment and financial activities (Warmann, 2015). Students rarely come in to student services offices wanting to accomplish a single task; they have multiple needs that call for a staff with broad knowledge and specific training (Nealon, 2007, p. 8).

Student services departments have evolved in order to support the mission of institutions in higher education. The role of student services is to support and contribute to student learning (Winston, 2003). However, students and parents are not just learners; they

are consumers of higher education. Colleges must see that expectations for quality service have risen dramatically.

Higher Education as a Competitive Business

Colleges and universities are in a competitive battle for students (Rothschild & White, 1995; Sines & Duckworth, 1994). Community colleges are in a complex, dynamic environment. They attempt to respond to the needs of their communities, their students, and other stakeholders in order to provide cost-effective, quality services (Bontrager & Clemetsen, 2009). Students are attracted to college campuses by marketing activities (Brennan & Bennington, 1999) and since education is an intangible product, differentiation amongst competitors is important (Sines & Duckworth, 1994). Tuition increases have led to higher expectations of colleges from students and their parents. If families are paying thousands, or tens of thousands, of dollars in tuition each year, they do not want a frustrating experience (Gardner, 2016). Colleges facing enrollment problems and fighting for the best students have an incentive to give their students better services and a better experience. It's not just about the quality of the product, but what comes with the purchase. Community colleges offer other types of support for students, including advising, tutoring, mental health counseling, campus activities, financial aid, and other services in support of the education process (Bontrager & Clemetsen, 2009). Doing a better job of meeting student needs can pay off with higher retention and graduation rates and, down the road, more satisfied alumni who might be more inclined to give back (Gardner, 2016).

Within an increasingly competitive marketplace for student enrollments (Beede & Burnett, 1999), students and parents have heightened demands for better service and maximum dollar value (Kleinman, 1999). College degree attainment is one factor driving the competitive business mentality within higher education. The American Graduation Initiative

(AGI), introduced by President Obama in the summer of 2009, sought to increase the number of post-secondary certificates and degrees awarded in the United States by an additional five million by the year 2020 (Kotamraju & Blackman, 2011). As the economy continues to evolve and become increasingly more complex, it is critical that our education system provides our students with the skills, ingenuity, and critical thinking abilities that can stimulate and maintain the economy as we advance in the 21st century (Nichols, 2011).

Colleges competing for enrollments are spending more to attract a student body at the same time state support is dwindling. According to a January 23, 2012 article in the *Chronicle of Higher Education*, state support for higher education dropped an average of seven point six percent in 2012 (Swanger, 2014). In conjunction with reduced public support, costs are increasing in higher education. Students want to have access to resources that are relevant in today's world. Students expect and use technology all across campus, and faculty use technology to teach their classes. Software, bandwidth, business systems, servers, fiber optics, telecommunications, etc., all require dollars to keep up, while public investments have gone down (Swanger). Reduced public support and a demand for access to better technology equates to more of a burden being placed on students and their families in the way of increased tuition and fees.

A common thread throughout the literature from the academic perspective is that there is a danger to colleges and universities competing for customers. Higher education has to be careful not to think of students as customers in the traditional sense assumed by profit-oriented businesses (Vaill, 2008). Colleges are evolving into businesses where customers, in this case, students, expect to be satisfied (Selingo, 2013). This shift, according to Selingo results from four key developments in higher education:

1. Rising prices. During the first decade of the new millennium, sticker prices at colleges have skyrocketed 68% at four-year public colleges and 39% at private colleges. As a result, once students are on campus, they put a price tag on every experience.
2. Part-time professors. In a bid to save money and increase their flexibility in a changing economy, colleges are hiring fewer full-time faculty and more adjunct personnel.
3. Revolving door. Colleges are focusing on and being rewarded for completion rates. Louisiana, Ohio, Tennessee, and several others are rewarding public colleges that graduated a higher percentage of their students.
4. The Millennials. The generation of Americans born after 1982 are often referred to as the “Me Generation” because they are considered to be most concerned with putting their own needs first.

Generation Z is rapidly replacing Millennials on college campuses. Those born from 1995 through 2010 have different motivations, learning styles, characteristics, skill sets, and social concerns than previous generations. Unlike Millennials, Generation Z students grew up in a recession and are under no illusions about their prospects for employment after college (Seemiller, 2016). While skeptical about the cost and value of higher education, they are also entrepreneurial, innovative, and independent learners concerned with effecting social change (Seemiller). Understanding Generation Z's mindset and goals is paramount to supporting, developing, and educating them through higher education (Seemiller). The skepticism of the value of higher education is another reason for colleges and universities to

explore integrated models of student services that focus on serving students in an efficient manner that meets their needs as consumers.

A summary of the literature in this area led the researcher to perceive that faculty and academic administrators see the college as an institution that should work hard to attract the best students to support a mission of learning. Student services staff and administrators believe that implementing a comprehensive set of services to enhance the student experience and provide an environment that leads to retention and completion. According to Scott Bass, Provost at American University, “A good institution that manages to make the experience of navigating college more user-friendly also will develop a market advantage on the front end. That will be an institution that I believe parents will line up to have their kids come to” (as cited by Gardner, 2016, final paragraph). Demand for quality service from the institution places an enormous amount of stress on the individuals that are tasked with providing services to students in this competitive environment.

Student as customer

There are conflicting viewpoints on the topic of student as customer in the higher education marketplace. Existing literature is polarized in the topic. Much of the literature denouncing the metaphor of student as customer focuses on the relationship between student and professor within the confines of the classroom. As students have come to think of themselves as customers who need to be satisfied, they have begun to view the professor at the front of the room as a performer (Selingo, 2005). Literature that supports the metaphor of student as customer typically concentrates on the activities students and parents are asked to navigate from application to graduation outside of the classroom environment.

The “student as customer” metaphor began to appear in research and scholarly journals around the turn of the century in American (and beyond) higher education inquiry.

The metaphor of the student as a consumer or customer is widely used within contemporary higher education, and impacts the ways in which students, academics and institutions behave (Tight, 2013). Every stakeholder in higher education (e.g., students, government, professional bodies) has a particular view of quality dependent on their specific needs. (Voss, Gruber, & Szmigin, 2007). According to Bellamy (as cited by by Beede & Burnett, 1999), “Student service, from admissions and enrollment to financial aid and advising reflect the importance an institution places on its customers – the students” (p. v).

It is widely believed that it is more cost-efficient for a merchant to keep a current customer than to attract a new one (Bejou, 2005). Institutions of higher education that subscribe to this notion may find it more effective in keeping students enrolled and persisting to graduation. While some college administrators find it difficult to accept the idea of students as customers, in reality, that’s what they are (Bejou). According to Bejou, colleges can prolong relationships with students indefinitely using a technique called customer relationship management.

When the student as customer metaphor was imported from management theory (Schwartzman, 1995), it sparked a debate in higher education. Many academics feel uncomfortable suggesting that students are customers because of the “customer is always right” marketplace influence (Scott, 1999). Satisfaction is not an appropriate gauge of quality in higher education. In business, the customer is always right, but in education the student is not always right (Demetiou, 2008). An essential part of the education process in higher education takes place when students learn from their mistakes.

Scott (1999) explored the concept of the student as customer related to Australian tertiary students and the application of marketing philosophies to higher education. He questioned why the topic of customer service was shunned in academics:

The question as to whether marketing really advocates the well-known adage and popular image of marketing that the “customer is always right,” for this image probably contributes significantly to academics’ reluctance to embrace a marketing perspective on the provision of higher education. (p. 194)

Just as the concept “the customer is always right” does not truly apply in business, it also does not need to apply to higher education. Scott suggested (1999) that educators can be service providers and “...deal with customers as if they are always right but not to the extent that the goals of the business fail” (p. 198). This argument allows for a more comfortable relationship between the business term *customer* and the academic term *student*.

Lomas (2007) used a qualitative study “...to explore whether academic staff considers students to be customers” (p. 32). After conducting semi-structured interviews with ten lecturers, Lomas concluded that a key theme was the impact of the introduction of tuition fees in England. Many English and Welsh students have only recently been required to pay tuition for higher education. Most of Lomas’ participants agreed that the new charges had an impact on both student expectations and the lecturers’ “awareness of student needs” (p. 37). Overall, Lomas’ study supported the general idea that students are perceived as customers in at least some sense of the word.

A strong warning was issued by Delucchi and Korgen (2002) against viewing students as consumers. They blamed undergraduate students’ general lack of engagement on the consumerism approach that many modern students bring to higher education. Delucchi and Korgen (2002) conducted quantitative research to contribute an empirical framework to the students as customer conversation. Forty-two percent of the survey respondents agreed

with the following question: “If I am paying for my college education, I’m entitled to a degree” (Delucchi & Korgen, 2002, p. 103).

Delucchi and Korgen (2002) endorsed a “student as customer” model outside the classroom but not within it. “If colleges and universities are simply supplying a product, shouldn’t the consumer be sovereign? No. While material objects such as dormitories and student centers may be made more ‘consumer friendly,’ the classroom should not be judged by such standards” (p. 106).

Taylor (2006) argued that a consumer orientation impacts higher education. Today’s student may view education “as a commodity to be consumed, acquired, accumulated (credit hours), not as a personal, created, transformational process” (Taylor, 2006, p. 4). Moreover, students’ “postmodern sensibilities and consumer approach to education are a remarkably poor fit with what schools traditionally offer” (Taylor, 2006, p. 1). He warned that the increased move to customer service models, which may be perpetuated by the recruitment process, might have an unintended impact that of encouraging students to believe that tuition money purchases a degree rather than an opportunity to learn. Business relationships based on a customer service model could have long-reaching effects, such as negotiating and possible legal action when expectations are not reached (Taylor, 2006).

Customer service concepts that work in the private sector can be applied to higher education; most notably to recruiting and retention of student customers (Sines & Duckworth, 1994). In an effort to continue to attract and retain students, institutions recognize the student experience as an important factor (Buultjens & Robinson, 2011; Small, 2008).

Colleges are looking for innovative strategies to create efficiencies in student services departments. “Students and parents are accustomed to a high level of service in their retail transactions expect higher education to offer the same conveniences and staff assistance” (Dillon & Sinsabaugh, p. xiii). Regardless of the comfort level of college administration and faculty to address students as customers, institutions of higher education that develop a model of service that establishes and maintains a customer-focused relationship can help retain and graduate their students (Boyd, 2012).

The bulk of the literature that exists on the metaphor of student as customer has a focus on the relationship of the student and the instructor in the classroom. It is important to note that the researcher subscribes to the concept of student as customer as it relates to the transactions that students and parents experience outside of the classroom as they navigate the processes to register for classes, apply for and receive financial aid, and understand and satisfy their bill.

Importance of customer service in an integrated model of student Services

A parallel issue to the metaphor of student as customer exists within the literature. Customer service in higher education is a base of knowledge that is slowly emerging. Many faculty members, and others in higher education, view the influx of business-style practices as an unwelcome invasion, arguing that corporate thinking undermines the altruistic values of academe. Nevertheless, the fact remains that an organization can do a good job at its primary mission, such as education, and still stand to improve how it serves those who benefit (Gardner, 2016). Selander (2014) spoke about the importance of customer service standards for University of Minnesota One-Stop staff at the NACUBO Institute for Student Services Professionals Conference:

Our training program includes a focus on customer service. We want our staff to be knowledgeable and have the ability to accurately explain policies and procedures. We also want our staff to examine a student record even if the question appears to be routine. In addition, we look for members of our team to be efficient. This includes taking a comprehensive look into all aspects of a student record and to verify all issues have been resolved prior to ending a transaction with a student. Third, we want our student services professionals to be empathetic. It is important to be active listeners and show patience with students. We also want our staff to be realistic with students, but remain positive at all times. Finally, we look for staff that are friendly. We train our staff to introduce themselves over the phone and in person while using a calm, reassuring tone and making eye contact.

Godwin and Markham (1996) provided an early venture into understanding service experiences of freshman in the college bureaucracy. They explored traditional college students coming into their first bureaucratic environment as an adult (Fisher, 2009). The qualitative interviews revealed five major themes: "...lines and waiting, impersonality, rules, 'the run around', and paperwork" (p. 671).

Hallenbeck (2006) explored a variety of Strategic Enrollment Management issues, including customer service. She stated that colleges and universities are focusing more on the customer service experiences of all the constituents, including students. Institutions are reviewing possible improvements in a variety of areas and expanding hours to meet student [customer] needs (Fisher, 2009).

Sines and Duckworth (1994) addressed the need for college administrators to accept the task of focusing on customer service because of the major impact it has on the recruitment and retention of students. Although many in higher education do not like to use the term customer when referring to a student, students and their families do pay the bills, and they are entitled to a level of service that is at least as high as they would receive from a business (Claus, 2007).

Chitwood (1996) discussed what he considered a major hypocrisy of the community college system: the fact that community colleges have typically provided customized training to other businesses but have not provided customized service training to their own staff (Fisher, 2009). Customer service is the primary role of the staff in an integrated student services center. Typically, the front-line student services staff will be the single point of contact for questions about financial aid, registration and student accounts. If the front-line student services staff do not have the answer to resolve a student's issue, they should become an advocate for the student and track down the appropriate solution rather than simply passing the customer along to another department (Cummins, 2007). Sines and Duckworth (1994) suggested that scholarly colleagues research the topic of customer service rather than simply shun the idea (Fisher, 2009). The customer service paradigm is more critical with services outside of the classroom.

In 2012, Boyd suggested that higher education could borrow the principles of customer service from Wallace (2010) as a way to reach a middle ground in the discussion about students as customers and the importance of quality service in higher education. Boyd then altered 7 of Wallace's (2010) 15 principles for customer service for use in higher education:

1. The success of the institution is dependent upon providing high-quality service to students. Students affect the bottom line.
2. Employees need to be reminded that every single one of them, regardless of their level of interaction with students, is in the business of serving students. Everything is woven together in the institution, and students deserve to receive assistance to meet their legitimate needs.

3. When it comes to experiencing service satisfaction, perception is reality in the minds of every student. It is important to understand the student in order to deliver service in a manner that is perceived to be satisfying to the student.
4. Each student is unique; thus it is important to understand the unique qualities of each student in order to provide service that meets their individual needs.
5. Employees should follow a variation of the Golden Rule by treating students the way that they would want their son or daughter to be treated.
6. It is hard to recover from a mistake, so when it comes to service to students every effort should be made to do it right the first time.
7. There is a need to solicit feedback from students at all times and then listen, especially when it hurts. How else can a high level of service be measured?

The quality of service provided to students is important (Demetriou, 2008). The basic tenets of the customer-service paradigm provided by Boyd (2012) that can improve the student experience within the higher education marketplace include treating students with dignity and respect. This is a basic human necessity and right. Students should be given clear directions on how to solve their problems and issues. They should not be given the run around. Students are at college to study and learn, not go on a wild goose chase all over campus trying to find the answers to simple questions. Next, be responsive to students and their parents. “If you tell a parent you will call them back today, then call them back today” (Ewers, 2010, p. 2). Finally, being true to your word means a lot to students and their families. Give timely answers to students’ questions and regular feedback on their progress.

The intent of student affairs has always been to connect people who need with people who care (Chambers, 1987). The review of the literature revealed that inadequate attention

has been given to the personnel that are tasked with delivering quality customer service to students and their parents at community colleges. The goal of this study was to add to the literature on front-line student services staff, and ascertain how these personnel transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model and illustrate the importance of that transformation on the service quality provided to students. Front-line student services staff can become more knowledgeable about efficient customer service, while understanding that good service does not have to constantly mean that the customer is always right (Fisher, 2009).

Conceptual Framework - Schlossberg's Theory of Transition

Schlossberg's theory of transition was used as a framework to guide the study. Anderson, Goodman, and Schlossberg (2012) used the theory to counsel adults in transition, specifically addressing individual, relationship, and workplace transitions. Evans, Forney, Guido, Patton, and Renn (2010) employed the theory to describe adult learning, assessment, and student services interventions in the context of student development in college. Although applications of the theory in support of adult learners and counseling adults in transition are valuable, it is important not to pigeonhole Schlossberg's theory as one that is meaningful solely in designing interventions for adults. Chickering and Schlossberg (2001) conceptualized the process of college attendance as involving phases of moving in, moving through, and moving out, with certain transitions and accompanying supports being characteristic of each period (Evans et al., 2010).

Staff who move into a new role have common needs. They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new model. Institutions should devote time to help individuals know what is expected of them (Anderson et al., 2012). The staff of all five institutions of higher education experienced the "moving out, moving in and

moving through” process as they made the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model.

Moving out

Four of the five institutions of higher education began the process of transitioning to an integrated model of student services by making decisions on how they would staff the new model. Urban Community College, Riverview University, and Lakeview Liberal Arts College chose to select existing front-line student services staff from the financial aid, enrollment services, and cashiers position and cross-train them to take the new integrated student services positions. Prairie Horizon, in contrast, chose to create the positions, post them to their employment page, and solicit candidates to interview for the new positions. Border Community College began their process by initially renovating their space. When the decision to move to an integrated model was added to their plan, Border chose to work with existing staff in a similar manner to Urban, Riverview, and Lakeview. Counselors frequently hear about grief that accompanies the moving-out phase. Even when the job change is voluntary, there is a process of mourning the old ways. When the change is involuntary, the grief can be intense, much like losing a loved one (Anderson et al., 2012).

Moving in

The transition to a new position requires the front-line student services staff to understand the expectations of peers and supervisors and often requires learning new skills and new ways of utilizing old expertise (Anderson et al., 2012). Many employers fail to provide a true orientation to new jobs. As a result, as many as 50 to 50% of staff leave their new positions within the first seven months (Leibowitz, Schlossberg, & Shore, 1995). The researcher studied participants to learn about the structure that was put in place at all five

institutions of higher education to support the transition of the front-line staff to the new model of service.

Moving through

Front-line student services staff experiencing transition to a new role may encounter confusion and distress over navigating different routines and expectations. The moving through period begins once front-line staff know the ropes (Anderson et al., 2012). Strong interpersonal skills, conflict resolution skills, and job knowledge assist front-line staff with change. However, lack of time prevents front-line staff from developing shared learning, meaning, and identity as a community in support of institutional improvement. Research indicates institutional resources that support the professional development of front-line staff nurture the staff members' community and support for new activities related to institutional mission (Warmann, 2015).

Utility of Schlossberg's Theory

Schlossberg's Theory of Transition is a psychosocial model of development that examines life events which affect various aspects of an individual's life and their societal roles (Evans et al., 2010). The process of leaving one set of roles, relationships, routines, assumptions, and establishing new ones takes time. The process of a transition occurs in phases and involves leaving behind the old and moving on to the new through an emergent growth process (Anderson et al., 2012). During this process, people need to reconcile the paradox of holding onto both the comfortable and uncomfortable to fully self-organize (Bussolari & Goodell, 2009). As front-line student services staff change their role within an organization, they develop their own set of strategies to navigate the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services.

The current study examined the transitions of twenty front-line student service staff and the strategies they developed to navigate change in their roles at five separate institutions of higher education in the Midwest. The participants in this study were notified of the impending transition in a variety of methods. Four participants were notified their current role within student services would be greatly expanded to accommodate a new integrated model of student service. Three additional participants made a similar transition but applied and interviewed for the new positions created within the new integrated model of student services. Several others learned that the entire college would be making a shift in administration, only to learn later that their duties would be reorganized into an integrated model.

In order to understand the meaning that a transition has for a particular individual, the type, context, and impact of the transition must be considered (Evans, Forney, & Guido, 1998). The person's perception of the transition is as important to understanding how a person is affected by their changing life events as the type, context, and impact of the transition itself (Anderson, Goodman, & Schlossberg, 2012). There are those who might say the person moving through a transition is the only one who can define the transition. This study explored the perceptions of the staff who navigated transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model at five separate institutions of higher education in the Midwest.

The utility of Schlossberg's theory is supported by the number of applications of her work that have appeared in the student affairs literature. Not only is Schlossberg's theory useful in working with its original audience, adult learners, but it is also helpful when working with traditional-aged students and, indeed, individuals of any age who are dealing

with changes in their lives (Evans et al., 2010). Expansion of the use of Schlossberg's theory in higher education is needed and a qualitative comparative case study examining how staff transition from one model of student services to another provides an ideal setting. This setting affords a view of the transitions of front-line student services staff in their totality as perceived by the individuals experiencing them.

Summary

There is rich literature on both traditional models of student services and integrated models of student services. Researchers have thoroughly examined the evolution within student services from the compartmentalized siloes of the traditional model to the collaborative setting of the integrated model of student services. Authors have suggested that students are taking on the role of a customer in the higher education marketplace. Due to this shift, institutions of higher learning are beginning to place a focus on the level of service that they provide to students in the areas of customer service. Students' demand for higher service quality places a premium on the training of staff who will provide this service to the student customer. Cross-training of staff hinges on the ability of the staff member to understand how processes from multiple departments in a traditional model of student services complement each other in an integrated model of student services. Having an understanding of where these processes mesh enables the staff to offer a high quality of customer service.

There is a paucity of literature related to the transition of front-line student services staff when a college makes a transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services. There is a focus within the current literature about how students and staff perceive students as customers (Boyd, 2012). Research also exists on the concept of customer service within higher education and how it can impact the student experience

(Boyd). Scholarly research is needed that examines how front-line staff experience the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services.

This comparative case study was conducted to bridge the gap between previous studies on integrated models of student service and current needs. This study includes data on how staff experienced planned transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model of service for twenty participants across five different institutions of higher education. The findings nest between previous studies on how to develop and implement an integrated model of student service (Javaheripour, 2009), and how integrated staff work together in a community of practice to provide college knowledge to students after transitioning into an integrated model (Warmann, 2015). A goal of this study was to provide insight for administrators planning to make the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model, and suggest the level of support that is needed for staff who will experience the transition.

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH DESIGN

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this comparative case study was to describe the experiences of twenty front-line student services staff who have transitioned from a traditional model to an integrated model of service at five separate institutions of higher education. The purpose of qualitative research is to gain an accurate understanding of another's experience and to capture in-depth reflections by participants regarding their experience of an identified phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). A case study explores a phenomenon through one or more cases within a bounded system (Stake, 1995). A comparative case study is a research design that closely examines several cases that are linked together (Stake, 2006).

Multi-case designs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in comparison to single-case designs (Yin, 2014). According to Herriott and Firestone (1983, as cited by Yin, 2003)), "...the evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (pp. 46-47). Therefore, this study was able to utilize comparative case study methods to explore the experiences of front-line student services staff to describe the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. A comparative case study afforded the researcher an opportunity explore the phenomenon of how front-line student services staff adapt to role change within the context of an integrated model of student services across five separate institutions of higher education.

The goal of this research was to better understand the strategies and support systems front-line student services staff utilized during the transition to an integrated model of student services at their institutions of higher education. This research study provides new insights

into how front-line staff are impacted by workplace changes and how supervisors can better assist staff members in managing place of work transitions. The comparative case study method is applicable to examining policy as well as describing complex programs (Stake, 2006).

Research Questions

The central research question framing this study was: How do front-line student services staff experience the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services?

The guiding auxiliary research questions were:

1. What strategies and support systems were utilized by front-line staff making the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model of student service?
2. In what ways did front-line staff perceive the control they had over their changing role during the transition?
3. How did the reorganization impact issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity and ultimately service quality?

Methodology

Qualitative approach

Qualitative research is a way of knowing in which the researcher gathers, organizes, and interprets information, usually in words or pictures with his or her eyes as filters, using in-depth interviews and observations of humans in natural and social settings (Lichtman, 2006). Oldfather and West (1994) described qualitative research as likened to jazz. This comparison is fitting when taking into account that many of the elements of jazz exist in

qualitative research. Oldfather and West (1994) explained, “Like improvisational jazz, qualitative research embodies both deep structure and creative freedom” (p. 24). While deep structure guides jazz and qualitative research, they are inclusive, improvisational, interpretative, and collaborative. “Jazz is adaptive and is shaped by the participants. Their improvisations are collaborative and interdependent; the quality of the music depends on each musicians hearing, responding to, and appreciating the performances of other players” (p. 22).

The methodology of this study was a qualitative comparative case study framed by social constructionism. The qualitative approach for this study was appropriate to learn more about the experience of front-line student services staff making a workplace transition. Similar to jazz, each study participant shared a similar experience of moving out of a traditional model of student service and moving in to an integrated model, but may have different viewpoints that can offer perspective about change in the workplace. This chapter outlines the research design and detailed research methodologies used to examine how student services staff experienced the transition from a traditional student to an integrated model of student services.

A case study explores a phenomenon through one or more cases within a bounded setting or context (Creswell, 2013). Merriam (1988) and Stake (1995) defined case study using the terminology of Louis Smith who coined the phrase “bounded system” and added it to the case study glossary. The “bounded system” examines “...a specific phenomenon such as a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (Merriam, 1988, p. 9).

Yin (2009) offered a more technical definition of case study research: “A case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident” (p. 13). The experiences of twenty front-line student services staff at five different institutions of higher education, following a transition to an integrated model of student services comprised the “bounded system” in this study. Utilization of a comparative case study to explore the transition phenomenon of participants promotes the increase in knowledge ascertain how front-line student services staff transition with the bounded system. The case study technique enabled the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding (Yin, 2009) of the phenomenon of a changing workplace and ascertain what the experience meant to the participants.

Case study research is a strategy of inquiry in which the researcher explores in depth a program, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time (Stake, 1995). Creswell (1998) posited that case studies provide vignettes for the reader to vicariously experience the life world of the case. The case context is made clear to the reader as several of the issues presented using case methodology are researched with both confirming and disconfirming evidence. This comparative case study focused on a specific period of time an institution was transitioning from a traditional model of service to an integrated model, and the experiences of the front-line staff who were asked to change their role within the institution.

Case study research design contains a component referred to in the literature as the unit of analysis. Yin (2014) described the unit of analysis as what the case study is analyzing:

“Selection of the appropriate unit of analysis will occur when you accurately specify your primary research questions” (p. 31). The unit of analysis is linked specifically to the research questions developed by the researcher. The unit of analysis of a case study is influenced by one’s philosophical, theoretical, or disciplinary orientation (Merriam, 1988). The units of analysis in this study were the twenty participants who experienced the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model across five different institutions of higher education.

Since case study focuses on a bounded unit, many researchers have pointed out that the issue of transferability is a limitation of case study research (Stake, 2005). On the other hand, researchers can learn much from even one particular case study. Qualitative case study research is inductive. This means qualitative research attempts to build theory through discovery of new relationships, concepts, and understandings, rather than through verification of predetermined hypotheses (Merriam, 1988, p. 13). Readers can learn vicariously from an encounter with the case through the researcher's narrative description (Stake, 2005).

The contemporary phenomenon investigated in this study was to better understand the strategies and support systems twenty front-line student services staff utilized during the transition to an integrated model of student services. This research was instrumental in nature because it was conducted to provide a general understanding of how front-line staff experience transition across multiple institutions. The study was carried out utilizing Merriam’s (2002) descriptive case study approach. Applying this methodology enabled this researcher to offer an in-depth, descriptive account of the front-line staff’s experience during the transition to an integrated model of service.

Philosophical foundation

The epistemology framing this qualitative study is constructionism. Crotty (1998) defined constructionism as “...the view that all knowledge, and therefore all meaningful reality as such, is contingent upon human practices being constructed in and out of interaction between human beings and their world, and developed and transmitted within an essentially social context” (p. 42). Broido and Manning (2002) suggested in the constructionist paradigm:

1. The researcher-respondent relationship is subjective, interactive, and interdependent.
2. Reality is multiple, complex, and not easily quantifiable.
3. The values of the researcher, respondents, research site, and underlying theory cannot help but undergird all aspects of the research.
4. The research product (e.g., interpretations) is context specific.

Constructionism best fits this study as a philosophical framework. The study examined the lived experiences of twenty front-line student services staff who have made the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model in the context of an institution of higher education. There was a need to examine the data and understand how participants constructed reality based on their individual and shared experiences. It was important to learn about their interaction with the transition process. The research on these lived experiences is complex and represents the constructionist epistemology.

Institutional context

This section describes the institutions involved in the study. Each institution was assigned a pseudonym for the purpose of anonymity. Table 3.1 provides demographic and enrollment information in addition to year the transition began transitioning to an integrated model of student service.

Table 3.1. Institutional context

Institution	Size	Control	Type of Institution	Year of Transition
Urban Community College	20,000	Public	Two-Year Community College	2007
Border Community College	6,500	Public	Two-Year Community College	2011
Prairie Horizon Community College	40,000	Public	Two-Year Community College	2015
Riverview University	3,200	Private	Four-Year Liberal Arts College	2015
Lakeview Liberal Arts College	29,000	Private	Four-Year Liberal Arts College	2006

Urban Community College

Urban Community College is a large, public, comprehensive two-year community college that enrolls over 20,000 credit students each year and offers over 115 degrees, diplomas, and certificate programs. Urban Community College began the planning for an integrated model of student services in 2006. Students forced to wait for extended periods of time in multiple offices to conduct business in addition to lengthy processing times of student paperwork coupled with enrollment growth spurred the conversation to explore transitioning to an integrated model of student service. Decisions were made on the model of service, staff that would make the transition, the creation of a physical space for the new model of service, and the addition of a new position to manage the integrated student services office. Urban Community College made the transition to an integrated model of student services during the 2007-2008 academic year. The model opened for student use during the summer of 2007. Initially, five employees with existing positions within student services were told that they would be transitioning to new roles within the department to accommodate the change to a new model of service.

Border Community College

Border Community College is a public, two-year comprehensive community college that enrolls over 6,500 students in more than 100 degrees, certificate, and diploma programs. Described as a two-year school with a four-year institution feel, the community college hosts 1,200 on-campus residents, and competes nationally in 19 varsity athletic programs, as well as vocal and instrumental music. The administration at Border Community College had plans to remodel a building housing the offices of financial aid, admissions, registration, testing center, and the business office. During the remodel of the physical spaces, the planning team began conversations about merging the front-line services to create an integrated student service; or “one stop” enrollment center. The planning team believed that transitioning to an integrated model would allow them to address long wait time and disconnected services in multiple offices during periods of high student traffic. As a result of the planning team envisioning a transformation in the method to serve students, the project that began as a simple remodel of physical space concluded in the creation of an integrated student services center. An office area that integrates financial aid, admissions, registration, testing, and business office operations. As a part of the transition, front-line staff were retrained to serve students in all of the functional areas of the new model of service. Border Community College front-line staff are now charged with assisting students with financial aid, admissions, registration, career, and transfer planning. The Border Community College Welcome Center opened to students in 2011.

Both Urban and Border community colleges are a part of a small community college system in the Midwest that serves over 90,000 students each year. The colleges of this system range from small, rural institutions to large, urban settings serving many students. The system is governed by a board of directors that consist of five to nine locally-elected

member who serve four-year terms. Each college offers a comprehensive educational program. The race and ethnicity of credit-enrolled students in the system are 77% White, 6% Black, 6% Hispanic, 3% Asian, 2% that identified as two or more races, 4.6% of students gave no response, 0.6% Native American, and 0.1% Hawaiian/Pacific Islander. The ages of credit-enrolled students in the system are 25.2% seventeen and under, 44.9% ages 18-22, 10.3% between the ages of 23-26, 5.6% 27-30, 7.8% have aged 31-39 years, 5.4% are between 40-55, 0.8% over the age of 55 and 0.1% gave no response to their age. The gender breakdown of credit-enrolled students in the system is 54.4% female and 45.6% male. 89.6% of the credit enrollment students reside from inside the state, while 8.9% of the credit enrollment population come from another state. In addition, 1.5% of the credit enrolled students are from outside of the United States.

Prairie Horizon College

Prairie Horizon College is a large, public, suburban two-year comprehensive community college that enrolls over 40,000 students annually and offers academic programs of study including seven different associate degree programs as well as over 100 certificate programs. Prairie Horizon College began the planning for an integrated model of student services in 2013. The changing demographics of the college's district led the college to adopt a student-focused strategic direction. To help support this direction, the College secured funding for a new student services building with a One Stop integrated service model as the focal point. This holistic, coordinated and efficient support experience for students was designed to reducing the run-around, ensure completion of degrees in a timely fashion, and secure employment in the students' chosen field. Prairie Horizon College made the transition to an integrated model of student serves during the spring of 2015. Initially, two employees

with existing positions within enrollment services applied for transfer to new roles to help support this new model of student service.

Prairie Horizon Community College is a member of a large system in the Midwest that serves over 590,000 credit students each year. The colleges of this system range from small, rural campuses that provide service to several thousand students to large, urban institutions that serve tens of thousands. Female students comprise 52.9% of the most recent fiscal year enrollment. Forty-three percent of the student population are minority (non-white) students. African-American students account for 14.4% of all credit students. Latino student represented for 21.2% of all credit students. The median age of credit-generating students was 24 during the most recent annual report.

Riverview University

Riverview University is a private, non-profit, mid-sized, coeducational, liberal arts university affiliated with the Catholic Diocese. Riverview enrolls nearly 3,200 students annually with fifty-three undergraduate majors and ten pre-professional programs. Degree options include Bachelor's, Master's, Doctoral research and professional doctoral. Fifty-nine percent of the student population are female, while 41% identify as male. Seventy-seven percent of students are Caucasian, while 4% identify as African-American. Seven percent report identifying as Latino. Riverview is rated among the top universities in the region by two national ranking publications. Students received more than \$50 million in financial aid last year. Maintaining a 10-1 student to faculty ratio, Riverview offers professional and liberal arts undergraduate majors, masters and doctoral programs. Students enjoy a dynamic campus that features a wide variety of varsity and intramural sports, more than 80 clubs and organizations – and reputation for amazing personal attention. A new Wellness and Recreation Center opened in the Fall of 2017.

Growing student populations and the need for more comprehensive service; led to the idea of creating a “one stop shop” in late 2014. A plan was made, space was created, and in July of 2015, Riverview Central was born. Staffing consisted of the administrative assistant from the Registrar’s Office, a cashier from Student Accounts, and the front desk person from the Financial Aid Office. In the six months prior to going live, group training was held with all new staff and they were allowed to job shadow to learn each departments procedures.

Lakeview Liberal Arts College

Lakeview Liberal Arts College is a private, non-profit, liberal arts and sciences college which serves more than 29,000 students at its central location and satellite campuses around the United States. Lakeview offers a wide variety of certificate and degree programs, including Associate’s, Bachelor’s, and Master’s degree options. Fifty-seven percent of enrolled students identify as female, while 43% identify as male. Caucasian students make up 71% of the student population. Twenty-nine percent of the student population identify as African-American, while Latino students make up 11% of the credit student population. It offers 10 associate degrees, 59 bachelor’s degrees and 4 master’s degrees. A confusing and time-consuming process for students to register, understand their bill, and process apply for and receive financial aid prompted Lakeview to examine the integrated model for student services. The College initially cross-trained staff from the office of Student Accounts to be able to assist students with the registration and financial aid processes for students attending the central campus location. Lakeview Liberal Arts College opened their integrated model to students during the transition evolved to include students studying in satellite campus locations from all over the United States. The result is a highly trained group of professionals serving students in multiple locations in an efficient model of student service.

Methods of Data Collection

Methods of data collection within case studies predominately rely upon information gleaned through interviews, observations, and documents (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2003). The data sources used within this study included personal documents, interviews, and observation of the participants in their “natural setting” (Creswell, 2009) of an integrated student services center across five different institutions of higher education. It was important to seek information from a variety of sources “...because no single source of information can be trusted to provide a comprehensive perspective” (Patton, 2002, p. 244).

Purposeful sampling

A consideration for all qualitative research studies is how to collect data. This study employed the use of purposeful sampling. According to Jones, Torres, and Arminio (2006), purposeful sampling is accomplished by identifying “...information rich cases that hold the greatest potential for generating insight about the phenomenon of interest” (p. 66). Esterberg (2002) defined purposeful sampling and noted that researchers “...intentionally sample research participants for the specific perspectives they may have” (p. 93). Jones (2002) justified the use of fewer participants in qualitative research writing “...because [while] the focus on qualitative research is on depth, the emphasis is rarely on sheer numbers of participants” (p. 465). Purposeful sampling was completed in this case study at all five institutions of higher education that were home to the twenty participants.

The recruiting process began by making contact with institutions that had made the transition to an integrated model of student service. I sent an e-mail to members of the Institute for Student Services Professionals (ISSP) list serve describing the study. I received replies from institutions that had an interest in becoming a site for the study. Those institutions shared names of staff who they believed met the study criteria and would

potentially be interested in participating in the study. The process to communicate directly to prospective participants began with an initial recruiting e-mail and a follow-up phone call to describe the study and discuss the details of the informed consent document. A copy of the informed consent document is provided in Appendix A. The interview guide appears in Appendix B, and all participant communication emails are shown in Appendix C.

Personal documents

Knowledge can be obtained through personal documents because they provide first-person descriptions of experiences that the individual has experienced (Merriam, 2002).

“Personal documents are a reliable source of data concerning a person’s attitudes, beliefs, and view of the world” (Merriam, 2002, p.116). The personal documents for this study are stories told by the twenty participants of their experiences working in student services at the five different institutions of higher education. Stories are a qualitative method of data collection (Patton, 2002).

Participants provided a written reflection on their experience of making the transition to an integrated model of student service at their institution. Participants were given the following prompt: Transitions are any event, or non-event, that results in changed relationships, routines, assumptions, and roles. Describe a transition that you have made while employed at your community college including memorable moments, both positive and negative. I want to hear your story about the transition.

A journal of my personal reflections was kept during the examination of the transition stories of the twenty participants. Journals are often used as data sources within qualitative studies as they provide a medium for the creation of an anecdotal record of the researcher’s reflections, questions, impressions, interpretations, and basic thoughts “on the problems, issues, and ideas you encounter in collecting data” (Merriam, 2002, p. 27). Journaling about

the stories of the participants has added an additional layer of depth to the interpretation of the transition that student services professionals experienced. It is through journaling that the researcher “describes in detail how data were collected, how categories were derived, and how decisions were made throughout the inquiry” (Merriam, p. 27). These journal notes served as an additional method of data collection within the study. They provided insight into my perceptions and reflections of the participants’ stories and serve as a source to drill deeper in the research through interviews and observations.

Interviews

The use of interviews as a method of data collection allowed for deeper exploration with participants in regard to their transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services. Typically, in qualitative investigation the in-depth interview is the method through which data is collected on the topic and the research question (Moustakas, 1994). A semi-structured interviewing process was used to gain a deeper understanding of the transition experienced by the participants. According to Merriam (1998), within a semi-structured process:

Interviewing is more open-ended and less structured...the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic. (p. 74)

The qualitative interview involves an informal, interactive process and utilizes open-ended comments and questions (Moustakas, 1994). As suggested by Moustakas, a series of questions aimed at evoking a comprehensive account of the participant’s experience was developed and implemented about the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. These questions varied, altered, and sometimes were not used at all as interviews took place. Often the qualitative interview begins with a social conversation

aimed at creating a relaxed and trusting atmosphere (Moustakas). It was imperative that the interviewer create a climate where the participants felt comfortable, and were able to respond honestly and comprehensively.

During the study, the researcher conducted three in-depth interviews with all twenty participants. The participants were encouraged to share additional insights or experiences by phone, personal visit, or e-mail over the course of the study. Interviews took place on five different campuses in quiet, private spaces agreed upon by the researcher and the participant. All interviews were taped and transcribed for analysis. The digital recordings, investigator's notes, and the transcripts have been kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home office where they will remain until the investigator's dissertation has been approved.

Prior to the interview, the researcher engaged in the process of "epoche". This is the disciplined and systematic effort to set aside prejudgments regarding the phenomenon being investigated (Moustakas, 1994). This allowed the investigator to be completely open, receptive, and naive in listening and hearing the research participants describe their experience of the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services. A general interview guide was utilized within the interview process. According to Moustakas, "...broad questions may facilitate obtaining rich, vital, substantive descriptions of the participants" (p. 116) as they experience the phenomenon.

The goal of this study was to understand how front-line student services staff experience transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services. As the investigator developed the interview protocol it was important to connect the process to the theoretical framework. Anderson et al. (2012) provided a model to examine work life transitions (p. 184). The interview questions centered on how the participants navigated the

moving out, moving through, and moving in phases (p. 184) of Schlossberg's Transition Theory. The model provides issues for the researcher to examine in each phase of transition. The questions of interview one sought to elicit the emotions surrounding the process of leaving a position, and the period of confusion and distress associated with that change. Interview two hoped to pursue the process of learning new roles and developing competence within the new model of service leading to a new beginning. The final set of questions aimed at developing an understanding of how participants adjusted to expectations of the new role.

Interpretive questions were asked as a part of the interview process. "Interpretive questions provide a check on what you think you are understanding as well as provide an opportunity for yet more information, opinions, and feelings to be revealed" (Merriam, 1988, p. 78). This portion of the interviews provided me with an opportunity to obtain clarity with the participants' perceptions of the transition and look more deeply into issues of motivation, satisfaction, and productivity. The interview guide protocol is provided in Appendix B and the participant communication appears in Appendix C.

Based on the information obtained through the participants' stories, in addition to the data from the semi-structured interviews, I was able to enter the environment of the integrated student services model at all five institutions of higher education campuses to observe the participants in their natural setting. Qualitative researchers study phenomena in natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005).

Observations

Going into a social situation and observing is another important way of gathering materials about the social world (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008). Yin (2009) noted that "...observational evidence is often useful in providing additional information about the topic

being studied” (p. 109). As the investigator, I was able to observe the integrated model of student services where the participants in this study are employed. Through the experience of direct observations, I was able to understand how the participants have moved through transition and are now operating in their new roles within the integrated model of student services. The site selection was limited to five institutions of higher education where the twenty participants are employed and engage in the practice of delivering an integrated model of student services at one of these two locations. Having the opportunity to witness the twenty participants in their natural settings on five different campuses provided me with insight regarding how the transition was working for them. I was able to witness students entering the space and conducting transactions with the participants. The integrated student service centers on these five campuses are public spaces where the researcher was able to observe the daily operations without interfering with student or participant activities.

Field notes were compiled during the following steps. The investigator began each observation by documenting the physical space and the descriptive elements of the space. Esterberg (2002) suggested that these initial notes are critical because “after you have been in a setting for a while, you will become habituated; that is, you won’t see certain things that you take for granted” (p. 74). Next, the volume of students that each participant interacts with and the topic were noted and recorded. Finally, the interactions between the participants and their colleagues were noted. It was important to observe the strategies for support in place for the participants within the integrated model of student services. I included both descriptive and reflective thoughts within my field notes. Creswell (1998) suggested that this is a productive practice to include notes about “...experiences, hunches, and learnings” (p. 125).

Field notes provided me an opportunity to capture direct quotes and dialogue that took place between the participants and students when the situation allowed.

Documents

Another source of data can be gathered through documents. These may be written, oral, visual, or cultural artifacts (Merriam, 2002). Stake (1995) suggested, “Almost every study finds some need for examining newspapers, annual reports, correspondence, minutes of meetings, and the like” (p. 68). The strengths of document review include the researcher’s ability to review documents repeatedly, have access to names, dates, and details of the events that transpired, and data recorded during an event (Yin, 2009). The weaknesses of document review include: difficulty retrieving documents, incomplete selection of documents to review, and the potential for bias because documents reviewed might be written by someone with a predisposed position (Yin, 2009).

Administration at the sites were able to provide documents including plans for training the front-line staff, job descriptions of the new front-line positions, plans for the physical space where the new model of service would be housed, and documents about why the transition to an integrated model was necessary for each site. These documents assisted in providing triangulation of data sources that help to provide goodness and trustworthiness in this qualitative comparative case study.

Methods of Data Analysis

The process of analyzing the data contributes to the goal of establishing the emergence of themes to capture the essence of the research questions: (a) How do front-line student services staff experience the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model? (b) What strategies and support systems were utilized by staff making the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model? (c) In what

ways did staff perceive the control they had over their changing role during the transition?
and (d) How did the reorganization impact issues of motivation, satisfaction, and productivity?

There are five steps in the qualitative data analysis process. The first step is “epoche.” During this step, the researcher assesses personal biases in order to refrain from judgment (Moustakas, 1994). “Epoche is a process that the researcher engages in to remove, or at least become aware of prejudices, viewpoints, or assumptions regarding the phenomenon under study” (p. 41). It is during this step that the investigator went through the process to put aside personal experiences in managing integrated student services centers in order to embrace the individual experiences of the participants in the study. This step was accomplished by writing a reflective memo in a journal about the experience of “epoche”.

Once data were collected, I began the process of reduction. This process consisted of “...continually returning to the essence of the experience to derive the inner structure or meaning in and of itself” (Creswell, 2009, p. 94). During this reductive process the investigator began to implement the second step of analysis called bracketing. In bracketing, the phenomenon is removed from its world context and undergoes a dissection process where the subject matter is confronted, as much as possible, on its own terms (Denzin, 1989).

According to Denzin (1989), the bracketing process involves:

- (1) Locate within the personal experience, or self-story, key phrases and statements that speak directly to the phenomenon in question. (2) Interpret the meanings of these phrases, as an informed reader. (3) Obtain the subject’s interpretations of these phrases, if possible. (4) Inspect these meanings for what they reveal about the essential, recurring features of the phenomenon being studied. (5) Offer a tentative statement, or definition, of the phenomenon in terms of the essential recurring features identified in 4 (p. 55-56).

It was within the bracketing process that data were coded to identify key phrases and statements related to the phenomenon. I used the process of open-coding to "...identify information about the data" (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Miles, Huberman, and Saldana (2013) described this as the descriptive coding process where the researcher is "...summarizing in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage of qualitative data" (p. 74).

A line-by-line analysis of the transcripts was conducted. I was then able to assign labels to key phrases and concepts within the documents, interviews and observations. In line-by-line review "...each word, phrase, or sentence is categorized and coded as a concept. Concept names are selected to accurately reflect and describe what the data conveyed" (Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2006, p. 44). As a strategy of data analysis, the investigator listened to the digital recordings of the interviews while coding the transcripts to keep the voice of the participants at the heart of this process. These codes were categorized using an interpretive process called interpretive coding. This is a process where deconstructed data will be reconstructed to establish connections between data sets (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2013).

The next step in the process was to code for emerging patterns. These codes enabled me to look for threads that tie together bits of data. These first bits of data and the review of coded information being pulled together were leads suggesting important variables to check out (Miles et al., 2013).

After all information was bracketed, bias was removed for the data to be evaluated on an equal playing field. Moustakas (1994) termed this third step as horizontalization. According to Moustakas, when we horizontalize, each phenomenon has equal value as we seek to disclose its nature and essence. I worked diligently to bracket biases on the topic of

the phenomenon of how front-line student services staff experience transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model of student services to allow each emerging theme to be viewed on the same plane. Allowing each theme that emerged to exist on an equal plane illuminated the transition experiences of the twenty participants in the study.

The fourth step in qualitative data analysis is imaginative variation. Imaginative variation allows for the analysis of the theme from various perspectives (Merriam, 1988; Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). The multiple data sources provided an opportunity to see the phenomenon from different perspectives that enhanced the themes emerging from the study and allowed for expanded analysis.

The fifth, and final step, in analysis is called structural synthesis. This process took place after a thorough exploration into the description of the experiences as told by the twenty participants, expanded through interviews and substantiated during observation in the setting of an integrated student services model. The investigator read all of the data for the integration of themes multiple times which lead to the construction of the development of concepts and theoretical propositions (Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). During this process the researcher was able to create a description of the experience of all of the participants in the study.

Criteria for Goodness and Trustworthiness

This comparative case study utilized strategies to ensure credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. These are the four standards associated with quality research in the qualitative paradigm (Anfara, Brown, & Mangione, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Credibility in qualitative research is reached through triangulation of data sources, member checks and peer review (Anfara et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Merriam (2002) suggested triangulation is completed by "...using multiple sources of data, or data collection methods to confirm emerging finds" (p. 31). This study was able to meet the criteria for credibility through triangulation of multiple data sources by using documents, in-depth interviews and observation. In addition, transcripts and the emerging themes from the interviews were shared with each of the twenty participants for member checking. In addition to member checks, both the Director of an integrated student services center with 10 years' experience in higher education, as well as a doctoral graduate from Iowa State University with 7 years of research experience, served as peer reviewers for this research study.

Another important component of the goodness and trustworthiness of a study is the "adequate engagement in data collection" (Merriam, 2002). This was accomplished by the investigator conducting all of the interviews himself, reviewing the digital recordings of the interviews while completing line-by-line analysis of the transcripts. An audit trail was utilized to create dependability in the research findings for this study. The audit trail is a "...detailed account of the methods, procedures, and decision points in carrying out the study" (Merriam, 2002, p. 31). Dependability in research can be achieved through data triangulation, peer review and systematic coding and recoding (Anfara et al., 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Confirmability was achieved through triangulation and researcher positionality. Merriam stated (2002) that researcher positionality is the "...critical self-reflection by the researcher regarding assumptions, worldview, biases, theoretical orientation, and relationship

to the study that may affect the investigation” (p. 31). In an effort to provide confirmability in this study, the following section addresses researcher positionality.

Last, I crafted a final report that includes rich, thick descriptions that enable the participants’ own voices to be heard by all who read the research (Jones et al., 2006). It is an essential part of this research for the lived experiences of front-line student services staff to be shared. Gaining an understanding of how they experience transition could lead to innovations in student services training design. In addition, a reflexivity statement acknowledging my personal bias and life experiences as the investigator was bracketed and added to this chapter.

Delimitations

The study began with a list of twenty-six prospective participants. As the researcher began to examine the written reflections submitted by participants, it became clear that three prospects did not meet the criteria to participate in the study. Two of the potential participants were moved to the back office as a part of the reorganization to an integrated model at Border Community College. The other prospect began the transition to the integrated model in a supervisory position and not as a front-line student services professional at Border Community College. The next opportunity to delimit the study took place after the first round of interviews at Riverview College. During interviews it was determined that three of the potential participants worked in the back office in the traditional model and after the transition to an integrated model. Since the study aimed to examine the transition experiences of front-line staff, these prospects were removed from the study.

The data collected from prospective participants prior to their departure from the study were not used to generate findings. The reduction of these six prospects left twenty

front-line student services staff remaining that made the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services.

Limitations

Due to my work background, my participation in the study could be considered as a limitation. The nature of qualitative study incurs the existence of a risk for misinterpretation of the data. As a former employee of one of the colleges in the study, it was important not to impose my experiences on the research. Since I was no longer an employee at that institution, it was important to bracket interpretations of cultural elements of what it means to be an employee of the institution. This was a challenging part of the study for me. However, I believe bracketing was successful and allowed for the lived experiences of the participants to be the focus.

Researcher Positionality

The relationship between the researcher and the subject under investigation is a critical threat to internal validity (Merriam, 2002), one that deserves autonomous consideration. If qualitative inquiry is like jazz (Oldfather & West, 1994), then the researcher is the instrument through which data analysis flows (Baber, 2007). Qualitative researchers are encouraged to confront their biases directly through a process called reflexivity. This process enables the researcher to articulate and clarify their experiences and personal point of view that could influence the research. “Reflexivity reminds the qualitative inquirer to be attentive to and conscious of the origins of one’s own perspective...” (Patton, 2002, p. 65).

As the researcher, I describe myself as a middle-class, white male who serves as an administrator at an Iowa community college. I have been a student services practitioner on multiple college campuses for the last 20 years. My interest in front-line student services staff experiencing transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated

model began when I interviewed for a position created at a Midwestern community college to manage a new integrated student services center. After the scope of the position was explained in detail, I was immediately intrigued about the possibility of working to create a model of service for students that allowed them to be served in one physical location by a team of staff who were cross-trained to be able to answer questions in multiple offices within the student services division.

My curiosity in this area of higher education continued to increase when I was hired into this new role and began the process of developing the model and cross-training staff. I have since moved on to different community college, and have completed the planning and implementation of an integrated model of student services. I believe that by researching institutions that have made a transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model, I can learn about the strategies and support systems that were used in the past to develop new insights relating to how staff are impacted by planned transition.

This research has the potential to provide a template that can benefit front-line student services staff through their transition and better prepare them to serve the student population at their institutions. Since there is a shortfall of research that has examined front-line student services staff and how they experience transition, I have been pursuing this research topic with the goal of finding themes that will assist future front-line staff with workplace transition.

As the investigator, I entered this comparative case study with a set of assumptions based on prior knowledge from my previous work within two institutions that has made the transition from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. I believe that it is essential to pay attention to the strategies and support systems provided for staff who will

be tasked with delivering quality service across multiple offices within the student services division of an institution. How staff experience transition can have a direct impact on the quality of service that students receive.

Summary

Unlike experimental research, a comparative case study is particular, not random. To utilize this method, I selected participants who not only experienced the phenomenon of transitioning from a traditional model of service to an integrated model, but also needed to be able to articulate that experience. Since the goal of qualitative research was to “illuminate human phenomena” and not generalize findings, the accuracy of the research depended directly on the individual participants and their ability to describe in great detail the experience being researched. Seven individuals from two community colleges were asked to share their experiences with the researcher. This research will be carried out in the natural setting of two different comprehensive community colleges with a purposeful sample of participants. Case study methodology was utilized to capture vivid details of the transition from interviews with the participants. The stories of these seven individuals served as a guide, revealing the essence of the experience from the participants’ perspectives in hopes of improving the process of transitioning from a traditional model of service to an integrated model for community college staff who are considering this transition in the future.

CHAPTER 4. PARTICIPANTS

This chapter provides an overview of the participants who agreed to take part in the study, followed by a description of each participant, focusing on their educational background, the length of time each participant was employed by their institution prior to the transition to an integrated model of service, their thoughts and perceptions about the change to an integrated model of service, and their feelings about operating in the integrated model now that the transition has taken place. In the third part of this chapter, information about participant viewpoints about the transition provides the context for considering how front-line student services staff make the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services. Prior to conducting the study with the participants, the research design was submitted to and approved by the Institutional Review Board at Iowa State University. A copy of the approval is provided in Appendix D.

Overview of the Participants

The multiple case studies included twenty front-line student services professionals from five different institutions of higher education from the Midwest. The participants range in age from 23–63 years of age. All twenty participants began employment at their institution in a front-line position in a traditional model of service, stayed employed as their college made the transition to an integrated model of service and are still with that institution in a role within the new integrated model of student service.

The sample includes 14 females and 6 males. Three participants have a high school diploma as the highest educational credential earned. Two participants have earned an Associate's degree. The remaining sixteen participants have earned a Bachelor's degree. Five

of the sixteen participants who have earned a Bachelor's degree have earned or are pursuing a Master's degree.

Participant Descriptions

Case One: Tina

Tina is a 46-year-old, front-line student services professional originally from the West coast of the United States. She moved to the Midwest when she was twenty-two. Tina earned her Associate of Arts degree immediately after graduating from high school. She recently has returned to college and completed a Bachelor's degree in the past year. Tina had never worked in higher education until she was hired at Urban Community College as a Records Specialist. Her previous work experiences included the insurance and health care fields. Her position at the time of the announcement of the transition to an integrated model of service was in the financial aid office, so her training and expertise were limited to financial aid information.

When Tina was notified that the institution would be transitioning to an integrated model, she had the feeling *"if something is not broken, why fix it?"* On a more personal level, the prospect of change made her feel as if her *"safety net was being ripped out from underneath"* her. Learning about how the physical remodel would take place was not concerning to Tina, but being asked to do *"more"* by taking on both financial aid and student accounts responsibilities was scary.

Before the transition at Urban, students would *"walk from counter to counter"* to get questions answered. The announcement of the new integrated model where students could *"have enrollment, financial aid, and billing questions answered in one location"* was *"quite a shock"* to Tina. *"It's always jolting when you are told that your job is going to change."*

As the cross-training began, Tina began to feel “*challenged*” with the added duties but felt that it “*kept her mind occupied*” during the transition. During the transition, Tina recalls the students being frustrated with the construction and felt that “*they probably didn’t think the construction area was a professional place to visit.*”

When the new model was completely implemented and the initial cross-training was complete. Tina felt “*empowered*” to assist students through all of the questions they had about registration, billing, and financial aid. “*Even though I was negative at times at the beginning of the transition, I knew it was a better model to assist the students with all of their questions instead of passing them off to other offices.*” It was never a “*good feeling*” to send a student away without answering all of their questions. Tina believes that the new model of service “*makes me feel empowered to assist students with start to finish service.*”

Case Two: Jill

Jill is a 52-year-old, front-line student services professional originally from the Midwest. She completed her high school diploma in 1983, and then earned an Office Assistant certificate from Urban Community College. Shortly after earning her credential from Urban Community College, Jill began working part-time in the Enrollment Services department at her alma mater. Jill was very comfortable in her role as a Records Specialist in the office of Enrollment Services. She was then promoted to a full-time role in Enrollment Services, and had worked six years full-time when the transition to an integrated model was announced.

When the transition was announced, she recalls feeling “*reluctant*” about learning the duties of the Financial Aid and Student Accounts offices. The reason she felt apprehensive about moving into the new integrated model was “*due to the added assigned duties.*” She was not confident that she “*could handle the additional stress of knowing how to help*

students through the process of the additional offices.” As the cross-training began, Jill began to see how the processes from the other office that would be joining the integrated model meshed with what she already knew. “I felt that it was going to be a productive way to help students, and I could see how they would appreciate not having to stand in line and wait in three different offices.”

Jill feels that the transition experience has made her co-workers even closer as they supported each other through the experience and even now operating in the new model. *“We are a close knit family and we all feel comfortable asking each other anything so that we can help the students get all of their questions answered.”* She has now worked six years full-time in the integrated model of student services at Urban Community College.

Case Three: Jenny

Jenny is a 37-year-old, front-line student services professional from the Midwest. She has been working in higher education for 15 years. She began her career at her alma mater as a Registration Assistant immediately after earning her Bachelor’s degree from Lakeview Liberal Arts College. She had a work-study position during her undergraduate experience and learned that she had a *“passion for helping students”* navigate student services processes in financial aid and registration. Her initial full-time position at the college was in the office of the Registrar. She worked for three years in that role before being notified that the college would be making the transition to an integrated model of service.

When she was notified of the transition, Jenny learned that she would be picking up duties to assist students with their financial aid. She quickly found her experience as a student worker would become valuable again:

It was really a benefit to have the registration experience from my full-time position and my experience as a student in the financial aid area as we began to transition to the new model of service. I could see immediately how it would

help me to serve students by understanding both registration and financial aid.

During the transition, Jenny remained positive, but there were times where she wondered, “*did I make a mistake joining this team?*” The process to learn all that is required to take a student from start to finish service can be stressful. She felt support from friends and family telling her to “*just hang in there*” and “*keep your boss informed and let them know what this training process looks like.*” When the new model was rolled out to students, there were growing pains, but the students began to see how they could be served in one location. Jenny commented:

Staff had to teach the students how to sign in to the queuing system, but once the students were in the queue and could see how long it might be before being seen, they seemed to relax. Once they helped with their questions and on their way, you could see the look of relief on their faces.

Case Four: Amanda

Amanda is a 50-old, front-line student services professional with over twenty years of experience in higher education. Amanda’s husband was in the military, and she had the opportunity to work at three different institutions of higher education in the areas of admissions, transcript evaluation, and managing a small campus location on a military base. When she arrived at Lakeview Liberal Arts College, her assignment was in the Student Financial Services office. She noticed upon her arrival that the front-line staff “*was already helping students with basic financial aid.*” Her duties included helping students with basic financial aid questions face-to-face and over the phone. When she was notified of the transition to an integrated model of service, she felt a sense of calm because she had experience in multiple student services office and the combining of services made sense in regard to providing the best service to students. Amanda commented:

When the director approached me about the transition it made sense to me. I knew there was a disconnect between students and the processes. In just about every transaction a student would ask a question that we were not trained to answer, so we were forced to send them to another office on campus.

Amanda remembers thinking, *“I wish I could help the student with the next step, but I can’t.”* As the cross-training for the new model began, Amanda recalls the feeling of *“positive change.”* *“I was definitely feeling challenged at work and that is important to me.”* Once the new model was in place, Amanda felt a sense of *“accomplishment”* when she could take a student from start to finish with service on her own. The students saw the change as well. *“Returning students who were used to the old way were so appreciative of being able to get all of their questions answered in one place without being shuffled to another office.”*

Case Five: Tammie

Tammie is a 38-year-old, front-line student services professional who was raised on the West coast of the United States. She has been working 15 years at Lakeview Liberal Arts College. She began her college journey immediately after high school graduation. After about a year and a half, life intervened; she got married and had children, and moved to the Midwest with her new family. Shortly after relocation, she found a job at Lakeview Liberal Arts College. Finishing her college degree was very important to Tammie. A perk of the position was tuition reimbursement, so she went back to school and earned her undergraduate degree from Lakeview Liberal Arts College in Sociology and Psychology. Her initial position with Columbia was as a Student Account Specialist. Her main responsibility was to notify students of their bill. If they had questions about financial aid or registration, she did not have adequate training to be able to answer their questions, so she was forced to *“ping pong”* them back and forth to other offices to assist. Tammie stated

When I first started at the college, all that I had access to in the system was information about the student bill. If they thought financial aid had not been applied correctly, I had to send them up the hall to speak with a Financial Aid representative.

When she was notified of the transition to an integrated model, she was excited to deepen her knowledge to be able to assist students in more than one area. Starting in Student Accounts, the transition to an integrated model felt “*organic*” for Tammie. She felt very comfortable adding the financial aid aspect of student service and felt it complemented her expertise in Student Accounts.

One of the parts of the transition Tammie felt hindered the initial success of the new model was a focus on “*fast transactions*” with students instead of “*accurate transactions.*” Tammie felt that there was “no rhyme or reason” to the process of assisting students. As Tammie and her co-workers continued to get more comfortable with cross-training from the other departments, they “*began to be able to answer more and more questions from students.*”

The process was moving toward the vision of an integrated model where students could come to one location and have all of their questions answered as opposed to the old model where “*they would start with the Registrar, come to student accounts, then over to financial aid, then back to us to get financial clearance and finally back to the Registrar to add classes.*” As the word spread to the student population that the staff in the integrated model of service could handle start to finish service, “*they were excited that we could take care of all of their issues in one location.*”

Case Six: Karla

Karla is a 52-year-old, front-line student services professional an Associate’s degree in Accounting. She has four years’ experience working in higher education. In her position prior to the integrated model of student service, Karla assisted students strictly in student

billing. When she was notified that Riverview University would be transitioning to an integrated model of student service, she became worried about how the change would impact her role at the college. *“I don’t like change; in fact, I really struggle with change.”* She really enjoyed her role at the college, but could see that when students were working with her and had questions about Financial Aid or Records and Registration, she would have to send them to another office. *“Even though I was nervous about the change, I thought the new integrated model would be a solution to some of the issues students were having in the old model of service.”*

While she was worried about how the transition to an integrated model may impact her daily duties, she felt that it would improve the experience for students at Riverview University. *“I had witnessed students coming into our space in Student Accounts who asked questions about financial aid, and we had to send them across the hall to that office where we knew they would have to wait in line again.”* Karla felt bad about the level of service because students had to *“jump around”* to get all of their questions answered. She also felt a level of frustration if a student waited in line in her office and ultimately she *“couldn’t help them and had to send them to another line.”*

Even though Karla could see the benefit of being cross-trained on the other areas in the integrated model, she *“felt nervous about learning the other skills because they looked confusing.”* Although she had doubts about being able to transition smoothly, she *“tried to stay positive and be helpful to the new staff and students.”*

Case Seven: Marlene

Marlene is a 63-year-old, front-line student services professional at Riverview University. Marlene has a high school diploma. One of the reasons why she applied for her initial position in the Office of Records and Registration over 12 years ago was because it

only required the high school diploma. For 10 years, Marlene was the “*first point of contact*” as students walked into the office of Records and Registration. She thought about adding to her education many times over the years, but ultimately her passion is serving the students. If she was not able to help them with their questions, she directed them to go to another office to resolve their issues.

The biggest fear Marlene had about the concept of the integrated model of service was that “*we had no idea what Financial and Student Accounts is all about.*” That caused Marlene to be “*nervous*” about the transition. When she was approached by her supervisor about the move to an integrated model of student services, she took the opportunity because she loves working with students and was excited to be able to answer more of their questions. “*My favorite thing about my job and why I am still here at sixty-three is because I like working with the students.*”

As the transition began to take place, Marlene felt support from the departments assisting in the transition. “*Great feelings when questions came up in the transition, we could go to people in the different offices and they made you feel like they were there to help you learn so we could help the students.*” The integrated model has given her expanded opportunities to “*work with students and parents with deeper issues*” than in my role in the old model of service.

Marlene noticed a change in the students who had seen both the old model and the new integrated model of service. She recalls students commenting that “*this new way is better because we get to sit down one-on-one and not stand at a counter with two other students standing behind you in line.*” Marlene feels that the students are pleased with the

new model because it is *“better to go to one place to have questions answered instead of traveling to three different offices to accomplish what they were after.”*

Case Eight: Shelle

Shelle is a 44-year-old, front-line student services professional. She has a high school diploma. After high school Shelle started a family, and managing the household was her primary role. As her children began to enter school, she re-entered the world of work outside the home and did work for tax preparation companies. When a position working the front desk in the office of Financial Aid opened at Riverview University, she felt that her work in customer service and the tax preparation industry would be a good fit. She now has over 10 years' experience as a front-line student services specialist in higher education. When she was notified that the college would be transitioning to an integrated model of student services, she was a little freaked out about learning to assist students in multiple areas of the college. *“I felt that it had taken me eight years to gather all of the information I needed to be successful in my old role, I worked so hard to get to that point, and I felt that the transition might take away the ground I had gained in financial aid.”*

Shelle considers herself to be a visual learner and only being shared the concept of an integrated student services center was causing her to struggle to see how her role would fit into the new model of service. *“Combining three offices together was something that I could not visualize.”* She did not feel comfortable *“relying on what other people were telling me about the transition to a new model, so it was difficult for me to make the transition.”*

The transition would require Shelle to make a significant change. In the old model, she was a *“lone wolf”* at the front of the office, providing triage services to students. In the new integrated model, she would be required to work with people *“from other offices who*

weren't aware of how we operated" in Financial Aid, and she questioned how she *"would get along with other co-workers"* from different offices.

While Shelle looks back now and feels that she may have been negative about the transition at first, she is now amazed by the benefits to students and the amount of information they can receive in one location. *"Looking back now, I believe that I had a lot of unnecessary worry."* Shelle believes that the experience of transitioning to an integrated model *"has helped me grow."* She feels that in the future she *may "embrace change"* and become *"more spontaneous."*

Case Nine: Bianca

Bianca is a 59-year-old, front-line student services professional with an Associate's degree in Accounting and has been employed with Riverview University for 20 years. The first 18 were in the office of Student Accounts. Her role in the office of Student Accounts was to be able to assist students with general questions about the contents of their bill and how to make payments. When Bianca was notified of the transition to an integrated model of student services she did not know how it was going to work. She was concerned about the amount of information the staff in the new model would be required to learn to serve students in multiple areas of the college. She was also concerned about her role and how she would fit within the new model.

During the transition Bianca wondered, *"Why are they moving so quickly with this transition?"* She questioned if the college were *"doing this stuff to downsize the staff?"* In addition to feelings of what her role in the new model of service would be, Bianca was also concerned about where her physical location would be in the new model. Making things worse, there was a period during the transition where the staff thought they may be required to move locations more than once. *"It was hard to think about packing and moving twice."*

Bianca felt this was an inconvenience for staff and students who were trying to access services during the transition.

Now that the transition is complete, Bianca can see the benefits to both staff and students. In the old model, during the busiest times of the year she would *“go six to eight weeks without being able to complete daily processes due to working with students.”* She feels that there are clearer pathways for students to navigate the processes for financial aid, registration and billing. In the old model of service, staff would tell students, *“you need to go here, and then go there”* to complete transactions. In the new model, staff can *“keep the student in one place and help them with all of their questions.”*

Case Ten: Martha

Martha is a 23-year-old, front-line student services professional at Prairie Horizons Community College. Martha began her work in higher education as a student at Prairie Horizons Community College. While working on her degree at Prairie Horizons, Martha was employed as a work-study student. She was hired into her student role her *“first day on campus.”* Since earning her Associate of Arts degree, she has gone on to earn her BS in Psychology and a Master’s in Student Affairs.

Martha worked for Prairie Horizons consistently as a part-time employee while she was earning both her undergraduate and graduate degrees. She was able to be a part of the transition from the traditional model of service to the integrated model of service as she was working on her graduate degree online and working on the front-line in student services. She has now returned to work in the integrated model of student service at her alma mater.

Martha has a unique experience in higher education recalling receiving services from the college as a student. She feels that the offices that comprise the integrated student services model today were offices that she *“couldn’t tell you where they were located.”*

Martha feels that the opportunity to work in the integrated student services center was an optimal first full-time position at the college. *She “can’t think of a better position” to begin working in student services.*

Martha has been trained on a wide array of student services and is able to deliver those services to students. *“It is an eye opening experience to learn the details to be able to serve students across multiple services.”* She feels like it is an *“amazing opportunity”* to develop conflict resolution skills and problem-solving capabilities. Martha believes her experience in the integrated student services center has made a positive impact on her personally and professionally:

The teamwork that is involved in serving students from start to finish takes an incredible amount of cross-training, but at the end of the day we rely on each other to get students answers to their questions and explain what will happen next.

The best way Martha can describe her experience is energized. *“I just feel engaged all of the time. I am challenged and learning new things daily. That’s important to me and keeps me excited about coming to work each day.”*

Case Eleven: Bill

Bill is a 24-year-old, front-line student services professional at Prairie Horizons Community College. Bill began his career in student services as a work-study student in the office of Admissions at Prairie Horizons. He enjoyed the work immediately and believes that he had a skill to perform the work well. After completing his A.A. from Prairie Horizon’s, he was hired on in the Admissions office as an Admissions Specialist and began working on his B.A. through Southern New Hampshire University online. During that process, Prairie Horizons made the announcement they would be transitioning to an integrated model of

student service, and Bill applied for a job in the new center. He was “a little nervous” moving into the integrated student services center, because *“Admissions was his comfort zone.”*

While Bill enjoyed Admissions, he was looking for an opportunity to grow professionally, and the integrated model seemed to provide that opening. *“A comfort zone is a nice place, but nothing ever grows there.”* The volume of work was intimidating at first, but Bill believes that he has a great team in place that has assisted in the acclimation to the knowledge base and the pace of work. Bill enjoys his interactions with students in this new role compared to Admissions because he can assist students from start to finish instead of passing them off to another office in his old role. *“In the old model, students were told that their next step was to speak with someone else, in the new model, we are able to assist the student with all steps and that is very rewarding.”*

Bill’s new role has provided him with more confidence personally and professionally. In addition, he feels more complete as a member of the team in the integrated student services center. *“In the new model, students can start and finish with us, to me that feels like I am more valuable to each student rather than just a stepping stone to the next person who can provide a different service.”*

Case Twelve: Freddy

Freddy is a 26-year-old, front-line student services professional at Prairie Horizons Community College with five years of experience working in student services. Freddy began his career in higher education at Prairie Horizons as a student worker. After completing his A.A. he began working on his B.A. through Robert Morris while working in his position as an Orientation leader. When Prairie Horizons announced the creation of the integrated student services center, Freddy applied for a position and was hired. Freddy started out as a hybrid employee *“doing reception and guiding students through orientation.”* He is

currently working on his Master's in Higher Education while working in his role at Prairie Horizons.

Freddy enjoys the role he plays in the new integrated model and he has a sense of pride being able to learn how to assist students with their questions in financial aid, registration, and billing. *“Being a former student gives me perspective to understand the whole process of registration, financial aid, and orientation.”* He can see the positive change and the way the institution is now able to serve students versus when he was a student.

Freddy has experienced the long wait times and being shuffled from office to office. He recalls the frustration of signing in and waiting in multiple offices. Freddy *“really enjoys working with students”* especially those *“who are going through similar situations”* as he did as a student. He believes it is important that he had that experience as a student and comes to work daily to provide a positive environment for students that need assistance. *“Many people look forward to Friday, and I am always looking forward to Monday, because it starts a new week to help students.”*

Case Thirteen: Matt

Matt is a 32-year-old, front-line student services professional at Prairie Horizons Community College. Matt began as a student employee in enrollment services at Prairie Horizons immediately after graduating from high school. He has had an opportunity to see the structure change over the years in his *“journey of outreach”* from his time as a student, to the Admissions department, until his transition to the integrated student services center. While a student, Matt remembers *“not really having a clear indication of where to go to get things done.”* He earned his Associate's degree at Prairie Horizons while he was working as a student aide and then went on to complete his Bachelor's while continuing as a part-time employee.

Matt enjoyed the excitement of the transition to an integrated model of service because while he *“craves structure. I thrive on throwing wrenches into things from time to time.”* It was important that Matt continue to challenge himself professionally and the transition to the integrated model added to his knowledge base, and he began to *“take the next step”* personally and professionally.

What he really feels has been positive about the transition is the ability to help students through all of the steps. In the traditional model, he felt that his *“hands were tied”* because he was not trained on aspects of the student process outside of his immediate duties. *It felt “very frustrating”* to have to say that to students, and he *“can only imagine how frustrating it was for a student to hear that from a staff member.”*

Case Fourteen: Juanita

Juanita is a 53-year-old, front-line student services professional at Prairie Horizons Community College. She has a Bachelor’s degree in Communications and Human Resources. Juanita was in the real estate business and really enjoyed working with people because customer services was *“in her blood.”* About the time her children were heading off to college, she wanted to learn more about the college planning process and applied for a part-time job in the Financial Aid Office and was lucky enough to be hired. After working for three years on the front line in Financial Aid, she interviewed for a new position in the integrated student services center and was lucky enough to be hired on as a full-time advocate.

Juanita has enjoyed her transition into the integrated model of service. She believes that her expertise in financial aid has given her the opportunity to share the financial aid process with her co-workers to make them a stronger team. *“Financial Aid is the hardest thing to teach”* in the integrated model, so the rest has *“come very easy”* to Juanita. One of

the skills that Juanita believes is something that the team at Prairie Horizons embraces is that *“we view working with students as a continuum not only helping them with the issue they came to us with, but also working with them to answer the questions we know they have not thought to ask yet, because we understand the entire process.”* The front-line staff have the responsibility to share that knowledge with students.

Case Fifteen: Ranae

Ranae is a 29-year-old, front-line student services professional at Border Community College. She earned her Associate’s degree from Border before earning her Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees. Ranae has seven years’ experience in student services. Ranae began in the Office of Admissions at Border Community College when it was announced that there would be renovations to the space occupied by several student services units.

“Change is exciting” to Ranae. She was acclimating to her role as a young professional and *“just trying to be good”* at her job. That positive attitude enabled her to be very positive about the renovations taking place. During the renovations, Ranae recalls conversations beginning about making modifications to the organizational structure in addition to the physical changes. As she reflects on the transition, she is able to remember students being frustrated *“trying to figure out”* the process to visit multiple offices on different floors of their facility.

Ranae has maintained her positive outlook throughout the transition, but does admit that she believes *“other people felt differently”* about the changes taking place. As the transition came to a close and the new model of service opened for business, she could see the difference in students right away who *“thought the space looked cosmetically beautiful and were happy one person could help them with all of their questions.”*

Case Sixteen: Jackie

Jackie is a 31-year-old, front-line student services professional at Border Community College. She earned her Associate's degree from Border in 2006. During her time as a student, she was a work-study employee and had assignments as a tour guide and tutor that she really enjoyed. After graduating from Border, she transferred to a 4-year institution to complete a Bachelor's in Communication Studies. She returned after completing her Bachelor's and has been employed at Border for eight years as a student services professional.

The first recollection Jackie has about the transition to the integrated model was the shift in her responsibilities as an advisor. As a part of the transition, she was required *“to transition to learn about the financial aid process and be able to assist students with both advising and financial aid.”* Jackie understood the shift in responsibilities because in her role as advisor, she would witness students *“going person to person”* to have their questions answered.

Jackie recalls the time when the transition was taking place as *“hectic”*. There were staff changes during that part of the transition and at times *she “was the only one trained to assist students with financial aid.”* The transition was a stressful time for Jackie because there was *“no one else to share the burden.”* Jackie *“never questioned”* the rationale behind the change to the new integrated model. The staff could see the new model *“would allow staff to serve students in a more positive way.”* The experience of transition and learning financial aid *“was terrifying at the time.”*

Case Seventeen: Scott

Scott is a 39-year-old, student services professional at Border Community College. Scott began his education at Border where he earned an Associate of Arts degree. Since that

time he has completed both a Bachelor's degree and a Master's of Organizational Leadership. Scott has nearly 14 years of experience in student services at Border Community College. He remembers being notified about the remodel of the student services wing of the college.

Conversation and planning about transitioning to an integrated model of service did not begin until after the physical remodel of space. Reflecting on the transition, Scott does not believe that the institution recognized immediately that co-locating services meant they would have an integrated model of student service. As Scott looks back on the timeline of events, the *“conversation about reorganizing the division”* into an integrated model took place. Looking back Scott believes that the institution tried to *“implement change in an effective way that had the least amount of negative impact on students and staff.”*

Scott sees the transition to the integrated model as positive for students. He likes that the institution challenged staff to ask *“are we making decisions based on the way staff wants things or the way students need them?”* Scott believes that was a *“huge change in thought process for some people on campus.”* As Border Community College has come through the transition, Scott can see that the units in student services *“are much more collaborative.”* The positives extend to the students as well as he sees them able *“to flow through all of the processes we offer more efficiently.”* While the transition was challenging, *“it was a positive for the students.”*

Case Eighteen: Kylie

Kylie is a 33-year-old, student services professional at Border Community College. She has been working in student services at Border for 10 years. Kylie began her education at Border where she earned her Associate of Arts degree. While earning her degree from

Border, she was a work-study student. After completing her A.A., she earned a Bachelor's degree in Elementary Education.

Looking back on the transition, Kylie recalls being told in a staff meeting *"the building is going to be renovated."* As the renovation moved along and conversations began about the change in service model to students, staff in the Financial Aid office began to learn they would *"no longer be working with students face-to-face."*

The knowledge of this change was very stressful to the Financial Aid staff. The office became concerned about *"who would deliver information to students?"* The Financial Aid staff were told about the new model and how the advisors would assume those duties. Kylie felt it would *"be a challenge"* for the advisors to keep their duties and learn all about financial aid processes at the same time. *"How will they be trained and will they give the best information to students?"* were thoughts the Financial Aid staff had during the transition.

Emerging from the transition, Kylie has seen the benefits of moving customer service to the advisors. The Financial Aid staff is able to *"be more efficient because they do not have to stop processing to help students in the lobby."* That has improved processing time and allowed students to *"receive their financial aid packages in a timelier fashion."*

Case Nineteen: Renessa

Renessa is a 36-year-old, student services professional at Border Community College. She has 11 years of experience in student services, all at Border. She holds a Bachelor's degree and a Master's Degree in Education. Renessa worked as an advisor at Border during the time of the transition to the integrated model. She recalls being energized at the time, because she was asked to *"share ideas about the transition."*

Looking back Renessa feels that was a time in her professional career where she *"began to have a voice."* Since the renovation of space had been underway for a period of

time prior to planning for the transition to an integrated model, the conversion of staff duties took place in a very short time frame and was not well received by some personnel. Renessa questioned the decision to train advisors in such a short period of time with her supervisor. As she reflects on that meeting, at the time “it was stressful and not a shining moment” of her career, but it enabled her to “*regroup and figure out how*” she would be trained and ready for the opening of the integrated model of service.

As the new model of service was rolled out to students, Renessa could see an immediate impact to students. “*They loved*” being able to sit in one office and have their advising, financial aid, and registration to take place in one location with one staff member was “*exciting.*”

Case Twenty: Noah

Noah is a 28-year-old, student services professional at Border Community College. Noah has an Associate’s degree from Border and also earned a Bachelor’s in Business Administration and Accounting. He has seven years’ experience in student services, all at Border Community College. Noah was working on the front-line in the Business Office at the time of the transition. Noah and his colleagues were told “*how things would be*” and felt that “*everything was figured out*” by the time the front-line staff was shown the plans. There was trepidation among the staff because the plans showed an open space and the Business Office staff had been “*so divided*” from the rest of the student services team for a long time, so the team “*did not know what to expect.*”

Noah believes that, while they did not feel that they had a voice in the change, it “*was exciting to get a new space*” to serve the students. Noah began to see the positive impact of the new integrated model immediately. In the old model, the Business Office staff were in “*silos*” and not in a convenient location for students to access. The move to a more central

location in the integrated student services center provided a welcoming location for students to visit.

Observations by the Participants

The participants in this study shared their reflections and feelings of navigating the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service on their campuses. Their perspective formed by their relationship to the institution, experience within student services in higher education, and prior educational background. In the process of comparing the transition experience across each case, exciting observations emerged related to a participant's level of educational attainment, relationship to the institution where they were employed, and how those that made the transition positively view the continuum of service to students.

As revealed in Table 4.1, as participants described their educational attainment, it became clear that those with education beyond a high school diploma appeared to have navigated the transition in a more positive manner than those who had not sought out post-secondary education. Second, the relationship participants had to the institution where they made the transition to an integrated model seemed to have a positive impact on the ability to navigate the transition.

While all participants in the study worked on the front-line in the student services division at their institution during a transition from a traditional model to an integrated model, a requirement for participation in the study, those who had graduated with a degree from their employer while working as a student had more positive experiences during the transition process. Finally, those participants who viewed the integrated model as an opportunity to work with students to assist them through a continuum of service seemed to have the most positive transition experiences.

Table 4.1 Participant Information

Participant	Age	Institution	Highest Degree	Years of Experience
Tina	46	Urban Community College	Bachelors	5
Jill	52	Urban Community College	Certificate	5
Jenny	37	Lakeview Liberal Arts	Bachelors	15
Amanda	50	Lakeview Liberal Arts	Bachelors	20
Tammie	38	Lakeview Liberal Arts	Bachelors	15
Karla	52	Riverview University	Associates	4
Marlene	63	Riverview University	HS Diploma	12
Shelle	44	Riverview University	HS Diploma	10
Bianca	59	Riverview University	Associates	20
Martha	23	Prairie Horizons	Bachelors	2
Bill	24	Prairie Horizons	Bachelors	4
Freddy	26	Prairie Horizons	Bachelors	5
Matt	32	Prairie Horizons	Bachelors	5
Juanita	53	Prairie Horizons	Bachelors	3
Ranae	29	Border Community College	Masters	7
Jackie	31	Border Community College	Bachelors	8
Scott	39	Border Community College	Masters	14
Kylie	33	Border Community College	Bachelors	10
Renessa	36	Border Community College	Masters	11
Noah	28	Border Community College	Bachelors	7

Summary

The study was conducted to ascertain how front-line student services professionals make the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services. The participants' experience was linked to the initial questions for the study. When examining how the reorganization impacted issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and service quality, one must acknowledge the educational attainment of the participants in addition to their relationship to the institution where they made the transition. Those who had higher educational attainment and who were working at their alma mater made a positive transition that assisted in their ability to work with students in a continuum of service. Chapter 5 will discuss the findings and analysis from the study based on participant observations and information about the transition to an integrated model of student service.

CHAPTER 5. PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

This chapter offers and analyzes the data collected in this study. In an effort to gather information about participants' transition experiences, data were collected from three sources: face-to-face interviews, a written reflection from each participant, and observation of the participants in the natural setting of an integrated student service center. Despite my best efforts, a full set of data was not collected for each participant. Of the twenty participants, all twenty completed written reflections about their memory of the transition from a tradition model to an integrated model of service. In addition, all twenty participants completed three face-to-face interviews. I was only able to observe thirteen participants in the natural setting of the integrated model of services as they worked with students.

Written reflections and the text of transcribed interviews provided by participants in addition to observations of participants operating in their natural setting of an integrated model of service underwent a systematic analysis for the frequency of themes that appeared called content analysis (Esterberg, 2002). Uniformities in the data provided by participants were coded and compared to the conceptual framework.

Themes

The themes that materialized supply a framework for developing a greater understanding of front-line student services staff as they transition in higher education. The patterns that emerged are presented through three major themes: (1) *"We want to serve students better, but do we have to change;"* (2) strategies for surviving transition; and (3) fitting into a new role. Each common theme attempts to accurately depict the lived experiences of participants as they relate to how front-line student services staff make the

transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service. The themes and patterns presented in this chapter are followed by a summary of the data analysis.

Theme One: “We want to improve, but we don’t want to change” – Moving Out to Transition

The oldest and strongest emotion of mankind is fear and the oldest and strongest kind of fear is the fear of the unknown. (H. P. Lovecraft, 1927)

The aforementioned passage, was written by H. P. Lovecraft in the book *Supernatural Horror in Literature*. The passage sums up the feelings of many of the participants in this study as they were notified their positions in the traditional model of service at their institutions of higher education would be transitioning to an integrated model. While there was excitement surrounding the opportunity to learn new skills and information that could assist them in delivering better service to students, fear was prevalent in three specific areas. The participants shared they were uncertain how transition would impact their position, they were unsure of their ability to execute their new duties, and they were unfamiliar with the expectations of their new role.

Student services professionals are committed to delivering service intended to provide students with the most successful educational experience possible. Shelle stated:

I love my role and being able to help students, but I can see how our process was frustrating students by asking them to visit multiple offices and stand in line multiple times to make it through the registration and financial aid processes.

The participants in this study described the culture in the traditional model of service as one where students waited for extended time in multiple offices. They frequently became upset due to being sent to multiple offices to seek answers to their questions, only to be sent back because “*we can’t answer that question*” (Ranae, Interview). Another participant (Tina) remarked how frustrating it was not to have the ability to work more with students:

I could answer questions about the registration process, but if a student asked a question about how dropping a class would impact their financial aid, I had to tell them I wasn't able to answer those questions. You could see the look of frustration on their faces as they would walk away.

While participants were frustrated with the traditional model of service, many felt confident within the role they knew. Bill stated:

I was very confident and comfortable in the world of my previous role. I was only asked to be an expert at one thing and I was able to help students with that one topic and it felt good to be considered an expert on that topic.

The level of confidence and comfort in their current role led some participants to generate feelings of fear and reluctance to transition to a different model of service. Shelle commented:

It had taken me eight years of hard work to get to a place in my position where I felt like an expert, so even though I knew it could be better for students, making a change and learning additional job responsibilities freaked me out.

Counselors frequently hear about grief that accompanies the moving-out phase. Even when the job change is voluntary, there is a process of mourning the old ways. When the change is involuntary, the grief can be intense, much like losing a loved one (Anderson et al., 2012). The patterns that support the “*We want to improve, but we don't want change theme*” emerged from discussions with participants about reflecting on their role prior to being notified about the transition to an integrated model of student service.

Pattern One: Staff Frustrated with Current Model

While conducting a workshop for people in transition, Bridges (1980) found although the nature of the transitions varied widely, all seminar members shared basic experiences of: (a) an ending, followed by (b) a period of confusion and distress, leading to (c) a new beginning (Anderson et al., 2012).

For the participants of this study, the world prior to an integrated student services model was dichotomous. On one hand, they were very satisfied and comfortable in their roles. They knew their roles well and executed them effectively and efficiently. While looking straight into my eyes, Bill recalled his comfort level with his role prior to the transition to an integrated model of student service:

I was very confident and comfortable in the world of admissions. I was able to be an expert at one thing. I felt that I had been allowed to develop in that role so that I was viewed at that level by students and my colleagues.

Similar to Bill, Matt felt that his role prior to the integrated student services center allowed him to operate within his comfort zone:

My job in the traditional model of service allowed me to be singularly focused on one subject matter. I really appreciated that structure. I was able to focus on developing one area of expertise, and it gave me a sense of pride that I was looked upon as a 'go-to' staff member by students.

Juanita, whose role prior to her institution's transition to an integrated model of service was in the financial aid office, felt “*well-versed in financial aid. Although I am careful about being over-confident, that's like calling yourself a 'master chef' or something.*” She recalled a feeling of being energized by being able to assist a student with their financial aid: “*When I can help someone, it motivates me. If I had a day of helping students, it created a feeling like I was skipping back to my car because I felt like I was doing something great.*”

Shelle started in a front-line role at her institution after being away from the world of work for an extended period of time and recalled:

When I came into the financial aid office as the front desk employee, I had been a homemaker for more than ten years and had no financial aid experience whatsoever. I was really concerned about being able to learn what I needed to be able to be helpful for students.

Once she began to receive training in her role, she built confidence in herself and her ability to serve students. *“I felt like it took eight years to master all of the information, and I worked very hard to get to the point where my co-workers and the students treated me as an expert.”*

While the participants of the study enjoyed their level of expertise, they could see how the traditional model of service was frustrating students who came to their offices for assistance. Jenny, who began her student services experience in the records and registration office at her institution, shared a memory of the student experience prior to the transition to an integrated model of service

Students were standing in line; the line went all the way to the back of the room. I can still hear them complaining about how long they had to wait in line. Then, to put icing on their cake, we had to send them to the financial aid office to see if they could afford the classes they just registered for.

Matt shared his thoughts from a staff perspective of witnessing the painful points of being a student in the model of service prior to transition. “In my previous role, I was answering questions over the phone on the front-line:

There were times where I didn’t have a call and meanwhile, at the other side of the room, there was a line out the door. I can remember students starting at me like, “Hey, what are you doing ...Why aren’t you helping me?” It was a constant feeling of having my hands tied because I wasn’t able to help them.

Jackie, who began as a front-line advisor and testing associate, shared her feelings of frustration with her role prior to transition:

Students would meet with us about the classes they needed and then if they had any financial aid questions, we had to pass them off to someone else, which meant they would have to go back out and wait in line again, which was definitely not convenient.

Karla recounted her experiences with students in her institution’s office prior to the transition:

Students would come in for help about their bill, but if they had any financial aid questions, they would have to go across the hall because that was a separate department and I had no training on their process. I always felt bad because the students had to jump around from line to line and I couldn't help them with a lot of the questions they had outside my area of expertise.

Amanda vividly remembered the student experience of sending students from the registration office to the financial aid office only to see those students return later in the day with additional questions:

We would tell students after they had registered that they needed to go to financial aid to see if they had enough aid to take the classes they just registered to attend. I can remember students saying, "So I have to go over to that other building, and then come back here to finish the process later?" I definitely remember how frustrating it was for students and staff.

Many participants in this study identified as being comfortable and confident in their roles prior to the transition to the integrated model of service. They liked being a respected front-line staff member who could assist students with one piece of the puzzle. At the same time, many of the participants had feelings of angst that they were not able to serve the students how they needed to be served. They could see flaws in the current model of service, but had only been trained on one area of the student services process at their institution. While they were frustrated with the current state of affairs, the next pattern examines how participants felt about transitioning away familiar roles and into a new model of service.

Pattern Two: Mixed Feelings about Announcement

From a human resource perspective, people have good reason to resist change. Changes in routine practice and protocol undermine existing knowledge and skills and undercut people's ability to perform with confidence and success. When asked to do something they do not understand people feel puzzled, anxious, and insecure (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

The most accurate description of reactions of the participants being notified about transition to an integrated model of student service is “mixed emotions”. While many of the participants felt excited and energized about change, many began the journey from the traditional model to the integrated model with feelings of anxiety and negativity.

Tina felt extremely close with her co-workers during the time of the announcement to the integrated model. *“Everyone was nervous as we learned about the transition, so there definitely was negativity that was introduced into our office environment.”*

Renessa looked back on the experience of being notified about the transition and admitted that how she handled the news was *“not a shining moment.”* She felt that she was stressed out by the announcement of change and *“did take it home”* in addition to being anxious in the office. *“I remember staff in tears at various points in the transition. We spent Saturdays migrating our files from one system to another in preparation for the new model of service.”* She recalled the process being stressful and exciting at the same time.

Shelle, who had worked so hard to become a subject matter expert in her current role, expressed worry about the transition:

I was worried about it. It's hard not to worry about something when you're so comfortable in your position and you've worked so hard to get to where you're at. It was worrisome to think about shifting gears after eight years in my current role.

For many of the participants in this study, the struggle with transition to an integrated model of service seemed to develop from a lack of knowledge about the model and what it would look like for staff and students on their campus. As administrators on campus at the five institutions of higher education in this study began to plan for new models of service, many of the front-line student service professionals did not have the opportunity to share

their experience working with students in the traditional model and develop the new model in partnership with their leaders.

Jill did not see the reason for the change at all:

I am old school and believe if something isn't broken, why fix it? I loved my job as a records specialist and didn't quite understand why the college felt the need to make all of the changes they were planning.

Tina, whose role in the traditional model of service at her institution, was at the front counter answering questions about financial aid. She explained how learning more about other colleges using an integrated model would have beneficial:

I think it would have been really helpful if we were shown an example of another school that was actually using this new model. To us, the whole process sounded really 'up in the air', not really concrete. When I'm going through a transition and I don't see a concrete ending, I feel like everything is just hanging in the balance, in limbo. I think that if there would have been visual examples of what the space would look like after transition. That would have been more helpful.

Renessa believed that her experience had taught her a lot about how she would handle change management if she has the opportunity as a leader in the future:

Our management did not communicate enough to our staff. They did not take the time to ask for feedback in a way that made people feel valued as an employee. We all had the feeling that regardless of our input, the administration was going to move forward with their plan whether we were on board or not.

Participants from institutions where administration was more open about the transition felt empowered and began to “buy-in” to the integrated model of service in an accelerated fashion in comparison to their counterparts at institutions who felt out of the loop with any decision-making in the process.

Ranae, a student services professional who began her experience as a student worker at her place of employment, felt empowered when her supervisor shared information with the front-line staff:

She gave us timelines as she knew them, she also allowed us to see the blueprints for the space and offer suggestions about how students typically access services. That was cool! We had access to the plans throughout the process. That is really how the renovation and development happens around here. The administration is very transparent and ask for our thoughts and input on change.

Renessa felt that she began to be recognized as a student services expert during the transition at her institution. *“I started to feel like I had a voice here. I was being heard, the suggestions that I made, I was seeing those changes reflected in the next set of blueprints. That was an exciting process.”*

One of the mixed emotions experienced by many of the participants surrounded not knowing where their physical office would be both during and at the conclusion of the transition. Bianca felt unsure about being moved twice. She wanted to say, *“Just put me in a place and let me do my job!”* She added:

I kept thinking, Do I have to pack all of my things in boxes? Will they put them where I will have access to them? I have a lot of paperwork I need to access for students due to the nature of my work. The thought of moving once to begin the process and then a second move was frustrating.

Tina shared memories about her anxieties as the process of remodeling the new integrated space began:

My insecurities were more on the logistics of the how the office would work during and after the transition. In addition to learning new roles, we were going to be asked to have our desks in the lobby to work with students and that was unnerving.

Kylie expressed concerns about physical space during the transition as well:

My office was moved to the ground floor during the transition, while the rest of the offices remained on the second floor. I felt like that was all I did, was go up and downstairs to get answers for students. During the remodel, there were times where the main staircase was closed, so that meant we would have to travel down a hall and up a different set of stairs, then back down a hall to get to our destination. We spent a lot of time talking about developing signage for the students so they understood where to go during the transition.

Some participants were not just concerned about their physical space during the transition, they also worried about where data was being stored and how paperwork was reaching its destination. Kylie also talked about the challenges of accessing paper files during the transition:

All of our files were still on the second floor, while our offices had been moved to the ground level. For us, a stressful part of the transition was to get files upstairs and to have trust that our student workers were merging files upstairs correctly without our direct supervision.

Jackie felt relief when the transition to the integrated model was complete at her institution:

There were times during the construction phase of the transition where we were in the basement. Then we were moved to the second floor. We were just relieved when the construction was complete because it really was a pain for staff and students.

Bill shared his excitement about learning something new:

As I mentioned before, I was so comfortable in my role in admissions, the 'ins and outs' of that world. I looked at this transition as an opportunity to be a rookie again, and I needed to be open and willing to absorb as much information as I could. It was exciting to face the challenge of learning new information.

While many of the participants shared feelings of anxiety and negativity about the transition that was about to take place, others shared their excitement and enthusiasm for a new adventure and a chance to grow professionally that was about to begin.

Ranae was aware that some of her co-workers were nervous and anxious about the transition, but she did not echo those feelings:

I saw co-workers who were also in my role that felt scared and nervous about what was coming. I didn't have those feelings, I was excited! Maybe it was how young I was at the time, but change was very exciting to me. Improvement is exciting and I wanted to be a part of improving myself and our service to students.

Amanda's first thoughts about the transition after being notified centered around her previous experience of working in different areas of student services at other colleges:

It just made sense to me. I was used to answering questions about different areas of student services at other colleges, so I was excited about learning more about our processes in other offices. I believed it would help our students have better experiences.

Juanita was really looking forward to the transition:

I was ready to be able to get in front of students and answer more than just financial aid questions. I was going to be able to answer questions about their registration and billing, too. I was excited about being able to do more for our students.

Juanita could see the benefit to learning the other aspects of the processes from other offices, and reminisced:

I really loved the idea of different challenges and the information from other departments. I was excited to learn more about registration and admissions, all of these wonderful avenues that I had no experience with. So, as much as I bring to the table with financial aid, I could see there was so much more to know, and I really loved that. That was exciting to me.

Throughout the interview process, the mixed feelings shared by participants were evident. Seeing this wide range of emotions sparked my desire to learn more about what specific aspects of the transition brought them the most anxiety. The cognitive dissonance displayed by participants as they balanced a desire to remain in their current role, while preparing to add the skills and abilities to better serve students was an indication the participants were experiencing the "moving out" phase of Schlossberg's Theory. The *Moving Out* stage of Schlossberg's Theory requires the employee to leave the comfort of old roles and expectations and adapt to new norms. It often involves the process of mourning for the old ways (Anderson et al., 2012).

Pattern Three: Fear of the Unknown

The transition to a new role requires the employee to understand the expectations of their supervisors, their co-workers, and the overall philosophy of the new model of service. Many of the participants in this study started their transition without a full understanding of the expectations of the new role.

Jill had recollections of engaging in conversations with co-workers surrounding the topic of expectations:

What is going to happen now that we won't transfer students back to financial aid advisors for answers? How well will be able to learn the financial aid process and give out information to the students? Do they expect us to know everything?

Jackie shared thoughts of being stressed and feeling pressure to serve students as she was notified about the transition to her new role:

It was pretty stressful. It felt like a huge weight had been placed on our shoulders. We knew we were being given a lot of responsibility, but weren't quite sure what exactly our new roles would look like and what exactly we were being asked to share with students.

Tina was excited about the transition to an integrated model of student services, but she had fears about her ability to live up to the expectations of the new role:

I think there was a lot of uncertainty surrounding the transition. While my personality allows me to be positive, and I like how change occupies my mind when I'm learning new things, there was definitely uncertainty. The atmosphere in the department was low after the announcement about the transition. It was definitely a little unnerving to learn about billing and enrollment services in addition to my training for financial aid.

Tina was torn because while she was worried about being able to execute her new duties, she also felt that she needed to be positive for her co-workers to get excited about the change. *"I tried to keep my feelings of doubt to myself, because I could see my co-workers didn't believe in their ability to transition to the new role. I was trying to boost their self-esteem."*

Bill felt that he was back “*at square one*” after being notified about the transition. “*I knew it was a great opportunity, but I was a little bit nervous about taking on a different role.*” Many of the participants felt that coming from a singular role where they were responsible for one body of knowledge to an expanded role where they would be responsible for a broad set of goals, expectations, and responsibilities for multiple offices was “*massively intimidating,*” according to Bill.

Bianca relayed her skepticism about changing to an integrated model of student services:

When they told us we were transitioning to an integrated model, I didn't believe it was going to work. I just kept thinking that this is going to be a lot of training and had no idea how they were going to get it done.

Shelle worried about leaving the comfort of her old role where she felt like a subject matter expert:

I was worried about the transition. It's hard not to worry about something when you're so comfortable in your current position, and you've worked so hard to get where you're at professionally. I didn't know if I would be able to understand all of the information that those other offices have thrown at them on a daily basis. Shifting gears was worrisome for me.

Jenny described her fear as “*stomach wrenching*” as she prepared to undergo the transition to an integrated model of student service. “*There was so much to learn. What if I am not any good at this? There was a lot of fear of the unknown, but I was still trying to be positive on the outside.*”

Jill stated she was reluctant when being notified that her role would be changing and she would be asked to take on additional duties in the new model:

The reason I was reluctant was due to receiving added duties. I wasn't sure I would be able to handle these new responsibilities. I just didn't know if I'd be able to learn them all and personally handle all of the new duties.

The final fear that appeared in this pattern was that staff were uncertain about how the transition would impact their positions. The fears spanned from thoughts of downsizing and losing their position at the college altogether to where their physical space in the new model would be located.

Tammie's uncertainty surrounded her feelings of being asked to work with money:

I was scared about working with money. I had seen how angry students were with financial aid and student accounts staff in the previous model of service, and I was uncertain how I would be able to adapt to that in my new role. People are uptight about their money I didn't know how that added pressure would impact me.

Jenny was unsure about how this transition would impact her position and the relationships she had with staff in her office and across campus:

A lot of fears, a lot of unknowns. I was trying to think positively about the transition, but I kept wondering, 'What did they do...Did they make the wrong decision...will we be able to do this and get along with everyone?'

Marlene wondered if the institution would need all of the current staff as the administration began to describe how the new model would be implemented:

When I first heard about the change, I was excited. I was listening about what the administration was saying they had learned from other schools. They made comments about how the department had 'become more efficient' and staff were 'able to better serve students by being cross-trained' I couldn't help but think one of the motivations behind the transition was to eliminate positions. I began to be apprehensive about the transition.

Shelle is a visual learner, and commented she could not conceptualize how the transition would impact her position:

The announcement of transitioning to an integrated model of student service freaked me out a little. We were combining the work of three offices into one, and I couldn't visualize how that would impact me on a daily basis. I was relying on other people telling me what it was going to look like, and it made me uneasy about the change.

Karla wondered how the transition would impact her directly. While she had been moved to the new model of service by her supervisor, she didn't know who else was going to be moved into those roles:

I had no idea who my co-workers would be. Were they going to move people out of financial aid, the registrar, student accounts, or all three? I was definitely nervous and how I would be impacted by all of the moves within the department.

Front-line student services professionals who participated in this study have a passion for serving students. Many are energized by helping students through the processes they are asked to navigate to register for classes, apply for financial aid and have it delivered successfully, and understand student account balances. They have a sense of accomplishment when they can deliver accurate information in a timely manner. While all of the participants could visualize how being cross-trained and asked to learn additional duties would be beneficial to the students they served, they also experienced trepidation that made them question the logic of making the transition.

For front-line student services professionals across the five institutions of higher education, the process of having a desire to serve students began long before the announcement of the transition to an integrated model of service. Staff discussed challenges and rewards they experienced as they developed expertise in their roles in the traditional model of service. While they were considered experts in that singular area, they experienced frustration at having to pass students off to others to complete transactions. They wanted to help, but were uneasy about stepping outside of their comfort zone when presented with the concept of the integrated student services model.

As participants continue to experience the transition to an integrated model, the focus shifts to another theme; processing the announcement of transition. The nature of transition

and the surprises that come with it, led to something new and exciting. While *moving in* to the transition can be taxing and stressful, coming out on the other side feels rewarding and satisfying.

Theme Two: Processing Announcement of Transition - Moving In

Learning in an organization takes place when three elements are in place: good mentors who teach others, a management system that lets people try new things as much as possible, and a very good exchange of information within the environment. (Aubrey & Tilliette, 1990, pp. 144-145)

Front-line student services professionals that move into a new role have common needs. They need to become familiar with the rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of their role in the new model. Institutions should devote time to help individuals know what is expected of them (Anderson et al., 2012). Participants in this study encountered various experiences when being notified about the transition to an integrated model of student services from their institutions. *“It was very clear what my role would look like, what they department’s role in serving students would be and how it would all fit together. I felt very clear support and guidance”* (Bill, Interview).

While some participants experienced clear expectations, others felt they were not provided a clear reason why a change in the model of service was taking place. One participant (Jackie) detailed her feelings on the lack of a solid reason behind the transition. *“Nothing really concrete comes to mind. I feel that part of the lack of communication about the change was they weren’t going to be able to anticipate all of the questions that we were going to be responsible for handling in our new roles.”*

As institutions began the process of transition to an integrated model of service, participants across all institutions were able to describe the assorted training strategies utilized to disseminate rules, regulations, norms, and expectations of the new model. *“My*

institution started by putting all of us into one location. We had one person who was transitioning from enrollment services, one from financial aid, and one from student accounts. We were still answering the phones from our old offices and just by hearing each other's conversations we began to learn from each other" (Tina, Interview 2).

The *Moving In* stage of Schlossberg's Theory requires the employee to leave the comfort of old roles and expectations and adapt to new norms. It often requires learning new skills and almost always requires new ways of using old skills (Anderson et al., 2012).

Regardless of the style or frequency of the training process experienced by participants across all institutions in the study, a pattern of a sense of community began to develop during the *moving-in* phase. *"We quickly came to know each other's strengths, especially as we began to learn more about the expertise we brought to our new roles. So, we immediately decided that we were going to lean on each other. We would use the knowledge from our old roles to help each other learn our areas of expertise"* (Matt, Interview 2).

The transition to a new position requires the front-line student services staff to understand the expectations of peers and supervisors and often requires learning new skills and new ways of utilizing old expertise (Anderson et al., 2012). The patterns that support the *"processing announcement of transition"* theme emerged from interviews with participants about contemplating their changing role after being notified by their institution about the transition to an integrated model of student service.

Pattern One: Reasons for Transition

Participants of this study did not have a common experience about being notified from their institution about the transition on the horizon. One set of participants felt their institution was very clear about the reasons behind the transition to an integrated model of

student services. While beaming confidently, Martha shared her recollection of her supervisor sharing why the new model was the best situation for staff and students:

When we learned about the changes that were coming, the first thing they did was to sit me down and give me a general overview of the reason for the change and the goals of the integrated model. My supervisor was very, very clear about the reason behind the change. He explained that our new focus would be taking a holistic look at what students needed. He even shared articles about other schools that had made the switch to this new model.

Comparable to Martha, Tina felt that her institution was transparent about the need to transition to an integrated model of service:

Our administration talked openly about observing how student traffic flowed into our office and witnessed the 'choppy' service they received. They (administration) explained research was conducted and college visits had taken place, and believed they had found a solution that would really help improve the experience of students when to our office.

Scott felt his administration had definitely recognized a problem in how students had to navigate enrollment processes at his institution:

There were clear breakdowns when students would try to access the enrollment process. I feel that my supervisor was able to communicate the student experience to administrators making the decision to change to an integrated model. They were able to explain very well why we were making the transition. We understood, because we witnessed the breakdowns on a daily basis.

On the contrary, other participants felt the institution wasn't forthcoming about the reasons behind the change from a traditional model of service. When, reflecting on her memories about being notified about the transition, Jill noted:

I really don't think much information about why we were changing was given to the staff. The information shared was how we were going to be changing and what our role would be, but we really weren't told why this change was needed by the college.

Amanda wondered if more clarity from the administration about the reason to change the service model would have prevented territory issues between offices about who ‘owned’ different pieces of the student services process:

I think it would have helped staff coming into the integrated model to be given clear reasons for why we were making the transition. Front-line staff did not fully understand what was expected in our new role and struggled with boundaries initially in the new model.

Shelle spoke about being given a “nuts and bolts” explanation about how the transition would take place, but did not feel like the institution took the time to straightforwardly explain why her role would be changing and the college would be undertaking a new model of service:

I know they gave us the basics. I mean, they told us we would be handling billing and payments and records and registration in addition to financial aid. But after they told us what we would be doing, I just still didn’t have a grasp on why they thought we needed the change.

While the process to notify front-line staff of the philosophy guiding the transformation to a new model of service varied for participants, a majority felt their institution provided clear expectations for their new role. “*It was very clear what my role would look like,*” said Bill. He added:

My supervisor explained how our individual roles would fit into the new process of serving students. My supervisor has an open-door policy, so I felt that I was able to ask questions at any time. I felt clear support and guidance.

Matt had a similar experience learning about the expectations of his role within the new model of service from his supervisor. “*The responsibilities and the functions were all very clear. Everything was detailed out about what our roles would be and how we would be supported by our supervisor and each other during the transition.*”

Jackie described her experience of her supervisor explaining the expectations of her new role and how she finally “got it”. She recalled:

My supervisor was explaining how daily procedures would change and how we would be trained to help students with more than one part of the enrollment process. Then she used the term “generalist” and it became clear to me that we were going to be able to find the answers about a lot of different things for our students. That’s when it became clear to me, that’s when it started to make sense.

Just as participants in this study revealed opposing experiences about the process to be notified of transition, they disclosed similar encounters concerning the expectations of their new role in the integrated student services model being announced. Reflecting on her orientation for her new role in the integrated model, Jill stated, “*I actually don’t believe we had any orientation. We were told the expectations of our new roles, and what we were supposed to learn, but we learned it as it came up, with the help of other people in the department.*”

Ranae shared a parallel experience about the training at her institution: “*I don’t remember there being really any specific onboarding on any topic...it was more like we were expected to help a student with whatever they needed and we had to find out from other people in other departments.*”

Scott stated that “*there wasn’t a whole lot of onboarding for me. I feel like the administration was more concerned about making the physical change to the space and that we would ‘figure out’ how to make the process all come together.*”

After Matt was notified about the transition to the integrated model, he began a laissez-faire onboarding process:

The first couple weeks after learning about my new role in the integrated student services model was very free form. I guess because of my experience

in admissions, I had an idea of how to work with students and start them through the process. The rest I just began to pick up from my co-workers.

As participants prepared for the journey of adding new skills and duties to their current roles, many used their current area of expertise as a method of supporting themselves during the transition to a new role in the integrated model of student service. Juanita shared that *“as we all began the journey to the integrated model together, we leaned on each other’s expertise in areas to be able to serve students.”* he continued, *“Since we weren’t able to close our office to students during the transition, our attitude was, ‘hey, we aren’t able to do the full wide array of everything they want us to know right now, but we all have one thing that we’re really good at, so let’s do that for students.’”*

Freddy was able to use his front-line skills to triage students who needed service while the space was in a state of uncertainty during transition to the new integrated model:

I was familiar with what documents to accept, how to help students fill them out, and how to mark them accepted in our student information system. That helped move students forward to the next step in the enrollment process. That made me feel useful while we were in transition.

Scott recollected about the infant stages of his transition:

When it first started, my co-workers based our duties on what we brought to the table. Luckily for us, we all transitioned from different offices. I brought registration, one of my colleagues had come from admissions, another from financial aid, and someone else from orientation. We had all of the subjects the administration wanted us to learn in one location.

Bill felt *“lucky”* that he had expertise using the student portal at his institution: *“I was very familiar with the portal, and we started the transition during a heavy registration period, so I was able to guide students to the portal to register online. It made me feel useful right away.”*

Martha had entered the transition to the integrated model during the summer, which is one of the busiest times for front-line staff, and commented:

Since I had previous experience in the office of orientation, I was immediately put to work in a computer lab. I was able to check students in as they arrived and walk them through the online registration. Even though I wasn't trained on some of the heavier processes, like financial aid, I was able to help students with what I was good at. It was rewarding to say, "I can do that" and help them out.

One participant (Tammie) spoke about how the entire office was encouraging. *"They did a really good job of making me feel useful and not overwhelming me with information. They allowed me to take my time to learn new skills and made sure I was learning it thoroughly."*

The experience of being notified about the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model took several turns throughout the journey. Participants began the journey by questioning why the transition was necessary. A portion of the participants felt their institution provided transparent communication and solid reasoning that justified the changes. Other participants felt that they did not receive adequate reasoning to make changes and ask staff to adapt to new roles in a different service model. After being notified about a work transition, it is common to want to learn more about the expectations of the new role that is related to the change in assignment. A majority of the participants in this study believed clear expectations of the new position had been delivered by their institution.

As expectations are delivered at the beginning of a period of transition, the next step is to provide an orientation or onboarding process to familiarize front-line staff with the day-to-day policies and procedures for the new model. The participants in this study reported they did not experience a formal orientation or onboarding process into their new roles. In the absence of a formal orientation program, participants began their time in the new integrated

model relying on expertise from their previous role as a support strategy to be able to provide service to students while waiting for formal trainings to take place.

Pattern Two: Strategies for Training

The participants in this study embarked on the training process aiming to develop the skill to deliver information from multiple offices within an integrated model of student services. The philosophy of training was unique depending on the institution. One pattern was consistent; there were many strategies implemented to assist front-line staff in making the transition to an integrated model of student service. Their previous positions were narrowly-focused on one procedure, and if a student had a question that went beyond their knowledge, they would need to transfer that student to another staff member to complete a transaction.

As they were notified about the transition and given the expectations of new roles, they began to understand the enormity of the process to become cross-trained on duties that would encompass knowledge from multiple home offices. They were going to be required to leave the comfort of old routines and areas of expertise to embark on a journey to develop a depth and breadth of knowledge that would give them the ability to serve students through multiple stages of the enrollment services processes at their respective institutions.

The participants experienced multiple training strategies throughout the training experience. A common first step for many participants was classroom trainings. Tina shared her remembrance of sessions with financial aid staff:

There were formal trainings in our conference room. We would break into two small groups. One group would stay in the student services center and work with students while the other would go to the conference room for sessions led by staff from different departments. When we finished with a topic, we would go back out to work with students and the other group would come in and receive the same information.

Ranae spoke about the training labs utilized for sessions at her institution:

We have a faculty and staff training lab and the supervisors would bring up topics on the screen, and we would go through information at our work stations. It was a good classroom environment because we each had our own computer access, so we could practice what we were being shown on the projector. I think that helped in the process to learn the toughest part for me, financial aid.

Bill stated, *“Our training started at a low level. We learned about registration and payment plans in the computer lab. It’s the same space student groups use during orientation. It was good to get off of the front-line, away from all of the students to learn new topics in a serene setting.”*

Martha remembered sitting in a classroom on her first day. *“The first thing they did was sit me down in a classroom, give a general overview and what we aimed to do for students.”* She went on to say, *“There’s a lot of details to learn to be able to work with students in the integrated model, I’m glad we had the classroom training to start.”*

Shelle had a similar account of classroom training:

We would go to a computer lab and have trainers from multiple departments come lead sessions and explain how processes from records and registration were closely connected to those in student accounts and financial aid. We were given a binder, and the trainers had the information on a screen at the front of the room.

As a byproduct of classroom trainings, participants began to develop written procedures for the duties they were expected to complete on a daily basis. Tina, who liked to have resources handy when working with students, stated: *“We did start gathering written documentation, because it was a lot easier for us to say to a student, ‘hold on, let me check that’ while we looked up the answer to the question in our binder.”* Tina went on to say that the binder gave her a sense of confidence to serve students immediately in her new role:

“Written documentation was very helpful right away. If I wasn’t one hundred percent sure of the answer, I could tell the student, ‘just a second’ and know right where to find the answer.”

Kylie’s written procedures included creating “*cheat sheets*” and quick reference guides:

When we finished with direct training, we sat down and made a notebook with cheat sheets on various topics and some quick reference guides that had a lot of information in one location. It made it easier to have easy access to information when working with students in our new environment.

Matt and Shelle utilized screen shots from the student information system in their written documentation. *“So I would walk around carrying three massive binders with system screen shots when I started in my new role. It was one strategy that worked for me because there were so many screens to learn in the system. That gave me peace of mind that I could look it up quickly and help the student,”* said Matt.

Shelle had a similar reason for using screen shots: *“We had a binder full of screen shots. That was my method of visualizing the information to get questions answered. It was difficult for me to absorb all of the information at first, so the binders were a life saver.”*

Both Matt and Shelle agreed the opportunity to work with written documentation in the form of a binder assisted them in making a successful transition to their new roles in the integrated model of service.

Marlene used written documentation as a training strategy, but her notes were saved in an electronic system. *“I placed a lot of my notes into our student information system. Depending on the screens I was in to assist students, there were places to add notes. That was a great way for me to learn about each process and when I went back into the system later, those notes were still there to remind me what I had done with a student before.”*

Operating in an integrated model of student service, the front-line staff were trained on the processes in multiple home offices. An efficient method to learn about the duties of a specific office is to shadow an expert to gain knowledge about how they work with students. Many participants in the study had positive experiences with shadowing co-workers during the initial training process. Ranae explained the process she experienced during the training process:

As the trainee, the co-worker I was shadowing would say 'sit here and watch me work through this process' and then they would point out what screens were needed to complete the transaction. They would also share the reason why going to those screens were important. For me knowing how to accomplish a task is important, but knowing why helps me to understand how each process connects with other steps.

Juanita really enjoyed going to all of the home offices at the beginning of her training:

I began shadowing in the office of the registrar and spent an entire afternoon. There was so much to learn. They were so good about letting me come back and master a task before I took it over on my own. Sitting with staff and learning the processes was such a positive process. When I felt confident in those processes, I could go back out to the front-line in the integrated student services center and put it all together for the students. Seeing the process done by an expert during training really accelerated my learning curve.

Matt, who wanted to get his feet wet with all processes before handling students on the front-line, went around to all of the different offices to gain experience: *"It was great to sit and observe to see how each process worked. It was also great to meet all of the people in the home offices and get to know them."* As opening day for the new model approached, Matt intensified his shadowing: *"As we got closer to opening the office, that's when I was one-on-one with specific experts in each department and shadowing them for about three quarters of a day soaking in all of the information I could be I was asked to do face-to-face interactions with students."*

As the participants shadowed experts from each of the home offices, they quickly learned that they could use each other as a training source as well. In many cases, participants had joined the integrated student services staff from different departments, bringing their own unique set of knowledge to the new model. That expertise would prove beneficial as participants began to coach each other as a strategy.

Juanita felt like her new co-workers identified early on in the training process that she was a 'go to' expert on financial aid:

Since I came from the financial aid office and was involved in the group training, my co-workers came to me when they needed help on that topic. They made me feel very useful right away. We all really were able to feed off each other, so we never felt that we didn't know what we were doing.

Freddy and Bill both brought expertise from other student services offices into the new model of service. *"When we all first started, I was able to share experiences from my previous office. We all kind of trained each other. Luckily, we all worked in different offices before the transition. That was really helpful."* In Bill's case, he appreciated being able to share expertise from his previous position and felt it was a way to be useful right away. *"I don't like feeling useless or like I can't do anything, so it was definitely a confidence booster really early on to feel I was immediately having an impact in my new role in the department."*

Martha, who came into the office with minimal experience, was not able to provide training to her new co-workers but felt like she benefitted from coaching from her teammates:

I was immediately put to work in the computer lab to check in students and encourage them to register online. If the student asked me a question, I was able to lean on my co-workers and their knowledge from a previous position at the college. That way I was able to learn only what the students were

asking, so I could break down training into small processes. I was able to learn those first and then dive into some deeper trainings.

The feeling of being allowed to lean on co-workers for knowledge and being assigned relatively simple processes at the beginning had a positive impact on Martha. *“They did a really good job of making me feel useful right away and not overwhelming me with information. I was able to make sure I learned things thoroughly.”*

Multiple training strategies were utilized by the participants of this study to gain knowledge about a multitude of topics as the staff added the skills and expertise of multiple student services offices in the new integrated model at their institutions. Even as effective as the strategies mentioned above seemed, many of the participants spoke about experiences they would have with students where they did not know an answer or know where to find information on that topic. After the participant was able to locate a subject matter expert to assist the student, it was important to share the experience with the administration so ad hoc trainings could be created on those topics, so the experience would not be repeated for the students.

Tina felt that her supervisor was able to identify when the front-line staff was struggling:

We had trainings going on all the time to learn different topics required to be successful in our job. It seems if we weren't able to answer questions right away, our supervisor would say, 'well, we need a training on that' and we would have a session the next day on that topic.

Renessa spoke at length about having to create new processes “on the fly”, and shared:

We would write down questions that we didn't know the answers to during the day and turn them in to our supervisor at the end of business each day. When we came to work the next day, we would have a quick training session on

those items as we needed them. It was a great way to develop deeper knowledge of all topics we were required to know.

Creating an integrated model at an institution of higher education takes tremendous planning, commitment, and training to reduce the number of offices students must visit in order to get information and support from their college (Walters, 2003). The participants in this study experienced multiple strategies during the training phase and developed their skills and understanding of the questions students pose in an integrated model of student services. As the front-line staff began to serve students in the new model, a final pattern of the “*survival mode*” theme was how the participants supported each other as a coping strategy.

Pattern Three: Culture of Care

The participants in this study navigated transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of service through a process that one participant (Tina) called “*survival mode*.” She explained: “*Making the transition was extremely difficult. There were times we didn’t understand why we were making the change, were asked to take on new roles, went through a ton of training, but the thing that got us through the most was supporting each other.*”

I asked Tina if she could clarify what she meant by supporting each other and she stated”

I think what helped us through this transition was those of us that worked on the front line got along very well. There was never a time where I would worry about asking, “Hey can you help me answer this question?” The camaraderie between the people that worked on the front-line was very good. We did feel like we were supporting each other because we all brought a different knowledge-base to the new office. That really helped us through the transition.

Noah felt that his co-workers had a very “*big-picture*” approach to the transition. “*Everyone was collaborating together. If something came up, we would all work together to*

handle the situation. Even if we didn't have every little step of a process mapped out, we could get through it by working together."

Scott and Marlene believed coming together was a very organic experience with the other participants at their institutions. Scott commented: *"I don't think we intentionally thought about what strategies we would use to solve problems or share information; it just kind of happened. We helped each other and developed a strong sense of togetherness in the process."*

Marlene shared a similar experience at her institution:

We didn't really plan strategies to assist each other, none of us had worked in an integrated setting before and we were all learning the processes for two new offices. We all had a huge learning curve. We relied on each other. We would walk to each other's desk or ask, "Hey can you come here and help me for a second?" We all got along really well and the experience of transition brought us closer as co-workers.

The sense of team is what Ranae remembered most about the beginning stages of the integrated model at her institution:

If a student was at my work station, and I didn't know the answer, I would tell the student to hold on while I investigated their question. Then I would go over to a co-worker and ask them. We would help each other. The students seemed to like multiple people working to solve their issues and as a team, we developed really good relationships. We really developed a philosophy of 'don't guess on something. Go ask; go support each other.

Juanita shared the philosophy she learned during the transition to the integrated model at her institution. *"We do what we have to do to serve students. We make sure they have everything they need. If we can't answer a question, we work with each other, we work hand in hand to find the person who has the answer for the students."*

Bill reflected on the culture of his office:

The biggest support to me and actually one of the things I like most about my job, is the team's attitude toward helping each other. Everyone is always willing to take the time to answer a question and help each other out. Supporting each other on a grassroots level is the biggest day-to-day, hour-to-hour support our college can provide.

Warmann (2015) wrote the following in her dissertation research about how generalists function in a community of practice in a community college one-stop student service center:

Organizations need to develop communities of practice to manage knowledge. These groups of people share a concern about a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and deepen their knowledge and expertise in that area by interacting on an ongoing basis.

This insightful observation perfectly describes the behavior I observed throughout the participant interviews and observations during this study which examined how front-line student services professionals transition in higher education.

Wenger (1998) defined a community of practice as a group of people who have shared interests, and who also participate in activities that contribute to practice and create a personal identity with the community. Three components undergird the notion of a community of practice: "...a domain of knowledge, which defines a set of issues; a community of people who care about the domain; and the shared practice that they are developing to be effective in their domain" (Wenger et al., 2002, p. 27).

I believe the participants in this study exemplify a community of practice at the institutions of higher education they represent. In fact, I believe participants have improved on the community of practice model to create a "culture of care"—an environment where staff support each other professionally with the outcome being a strong team of professionals

that places the focus on service to students. One of the participants (Martha) explained what that phrase means at their institution:

Our main mission is to support students. Although I consider an important part of my position to develop mastery of the procedures of the college, we are more person-focused more than procedure-focused. We bring a human element to serving students. I have never in any position felt more connected to our students and my fellow co-workers. Our team shows a passion to serve students and each other that motivates me to be an effective student services professional.

Theme Three: Fitting into a New Professional Role – Moving Through

Letting go of what we know is hard, but essential for growth and improvement. The quicker you let go of old things, the sooner you can learn new skills and create a better future. When you change what you believe, you can change what you do. (Spencer Johnson, 1998)

Spencer Johnson's brief parable about change in: *Who Moved My Cheese?* topped Business Week's best-seller list for three consecutive years. The basic message is simple and clear: clinging to old beliefs and habits when the world around you has changed is self-defeating. Flexibility, experimentation, and the willingness to try on new beliefs are critical to success in a fast-changing world (Bolman & Deal, 2017).

Front-line student services staff experiencing transition to a new role may encounter confusion and distress over navigating different routines and expectations. The moving through period begins once front-line staff know the ropes (Anderson et al., 2012). With the moving-in stage complete, participants entered the *moving through* phase to an integrated model of student service. During this phase, participants began to live the new role they were playing for students and within the organization.

As the participants began to embrace the new model of service, they experienced three patterns that support the theme of "*fitting into a new professional role.*" First, participants observed that it took some time for students and staff from other departments to

trust in their ability to answer questions from multiple offices. Next, as trust that participants could handle the depth of knowledge began to be established, the front-line student services professionals could see growth in themselves professionally. Finally, the last pattern to emerge was that the participants began to develop a strategy for serving students that could be described as a “*continuum of service*.”

Staff worked in the new integrated model with students, not only to answer the question they asked but also to anticipate future questions or issues that could arise for the student. Matt explained this phenomena during his third interview, “*One of the best feelings I could experience professionally is to be on the front-line, and take a student from A to Z without them really even noticing that’s what I was trying to do.*”

Patterns that support the “*new me serving students*” theme emerged from discussions during interviews and observations of the participants in the natural setting of an integrated student services center.

Pattern One: It Takes Time to Develop Trust

Participants in this study transitioned to the new integrated model from previous positions that required them only to have information about one topic. They were considered experts on a singular topic, but students were not accustomed to depending on front-line staff to assist with multiple topics. As the new model of student services opened for business, front-line staff who experienced extensive training in preparation to assist students with all of their questions, began to adjust to their new roles and expectations. While front-line staff were adjusting to their new roles, students were slow to trust their ability to be served by participants. This experience was a blow to the confidence of the front-line staff. Tina explained her experience as the new integrated model opened on her campus:

People didn't trust that we knew the answers even though we had been trained on them. Students thought we should go check with someone else because that's how it had been in the past. There were students that said, 'Are you sure that's right?' or "Do you want to go check with someone else?" and that was frustrating at the very beginning.

Jill had a similar experience as she entered her new role in the integrated model of service:

I would say when we first opened the new center, a lot of students would come and ask the same questions multiple times, just to make sure they were receiving the right answer. I think it definitely took students time to trust the new process. That was disheartening. We had worked so hard learning all of the processes, it hurt knowing students didn't trust us to be able to answer their questions.

Tammie shared her thoughts about why students were not quick to trust front-line staff in the new model. *"Students just weren't sure we knew what we were talking about because in the old model, we didn't know what we were talking about."*

I asked Tammie to clarify that statement and she replied:

We knew one thing, but weren't able to answer other questions, so we sent students away. Now we were able to answer a lot of questions, but the students had a hard time believing we all of a sudden had all of this knowledge. It was frustrating not be trusted right away, but we knew why.

Many of the participants shared that it was not just students who were slow to trust the front-line professionals in their new roles. Staff from other departments also seemed to take some time to adjust to the new model. Marlene recounted a faculty member that did not like the new model on her campus:

There was a faculty member that stood up at a staff assembly and said we couldn't possibly help students with all of that information. It was a really negative message. All of us were frustrated that we had gone through all of that training and before we had opened, some faculty didn't believe in us.

As frustrating as that experience may have been for participants, it was even more rewarding as faculty and students began to trust in the model and even promote the work of

the front-line staff across campus. Tina excitedly shared her memories of staff from across campus reacting to the services in the new model. *“I was very happy when colleagues from other departments on campus would send students our way with the message, ‘they can figure it out for you’ which made us so proud of the work we were doing.”*

Scott was cognizant of trust issues at his institution when the new model of service opened, but a shift in trust level seemed to take place as greater numbers of students were referred from other departments on campus:

I think as staff from around campus became comfortable with the concept of the integrated model, and that we could handle all of the questions in one location, we began to receive referrals from all over campus. We also began to see we were a main stop on tours for prospective students. It was great to hear faculty and coaches tell families, ‘this is where you go to take care of all your questions about financial aid, registration, and billing and it’s all located in one place for you.

Renessa echoed Scott about her experience as the new model opened at her institution:

I think the faculty felt that we had taken a little of their power, because the new model made it easy for students to ask us questions about advising. In the old model students would be sent to a faculty advisor, but now students could ask us about financial aid and advising, so faculty began to see less advising traffic. At first, we heard faculty were concerned about our ability to provide good information because we’re generalists, but now we receive referrals and hear from students quite frequently that faculty have told them, “go to the integrated student services center, and they can take care of what you need.” It’s rewarding to have faculty trust in our ability to take care of the students.

As students began to believe in the front-line staff and their ability to serve them through all enrollment services processes, participants began to feel empowered. Amanda shared her feelings about delivering service in the new model:

In the beginning there were mixed reviews. Some students didn’t trust our ability to answer all of their questions. Slowly, as students had positive experiences with us, they began to tell their friends and by word of mouth our volume increased. That gave us a sense of empowerment. I know that I began

to carry myself a little differently on campus. I felt that I was trusted by students to be able to help them with that they needed.

Pattern Two: Front-line Staff Experience Growth during Transition

Personal growth and development are relevant in workplace transition. In their book *Breakpoints and Beyond*, Land and Jarman (1992) looked at the process of transition for both individuals and organizations (Anderson et al., 2012). They determined that individuals must embrace the new and different elements of their role to be successful. Those who are able to incorporate the new skills learned during the transition can fulfill the expectations of new roles and reinvent themselves within the organization.

Juanita, who worked eight years in her role at Riverview University prior to the transition, was able to identify what she felt moving through transition into her new role in the integrated student services center:

In my previous role, I was only expected to be able to answer the questions for financial aid. I had no knowledge of registration or student accounts. I wasn't able to register students. Now I am able to work with a student and answer questions in all of those areas without sending them to another department. That's empowering. I feel like I've grown into a valued employee at the university.

When reviewing discussions with participants over the course of all three interviews, front-line staff cited more examples of feelings of empowerment and fulfillment than negative experiences with the transition to the new model. Jill shared concerns about the physical design of the new space and how it impacted her ability to feel safe in her new environment:

We did have a safety issue with the new model. In my old role, we had a counter separating us from the student and that made us feel safe. In the new model, students were sitting with us at a workstation and if they were made, they could reach across and grab you, punch you, whatever. The safety part was the only issue I had.

Among the participants who felt a sense of empowerment, Tina expressed her pleasure with developing the ability to serve students. *“I guess the word I would use to describe my experience is empowering. I was carrying myself different at work. I was able to answer questions for students and help them with so many different things. It was really cool.”*

I asked Tina if she could share an example of how she carried herself differently. She smiled and nodded, stating *“When staff from other departments on campus began to refer students to me specifically, I can recall feeling a sense of pride and thinking, ‘they really believe I can do this’ and I remember walking on campus with a lot more confidence.”* The examples provided by Juanita and Tina represent staff choosing to embrace new and different elements of their role and fulfilling expectations and reinventing themselves within the organization.

Similar to the feelings of empowerment by participants, some front-line staff shared how rewarding it felt to operate within the new model of service including feelings of fulfillment with their new role. For example, Freddy shared rewarding experiences in his new role:

When I came into this role I was given all these official responsibilities that I never had in the past. Now it was like, wow you can actually do this! In the past I would have had to give the student to someone else to finish the process. Now I can process it, do it right away for the student. That’s been so rewarding.

Shelle experienced a sense of worth in the new role:

It gave me a feeling like I was helping the college. Before, I was maybe just kind of being a secretary-type thing. Now I felt like I was actually doing good and actually helping the college more than I was before the integrated model.

Matt talked about how as his role in the integrated model became more defined, he was able to better serve students. In addition, he assisted in identifying a third pattern in the “*fitting into a new role*” theme:

I feel I have been able to articulate to students, through my ability to serve them, a sense of how rewarding my role is on campus. I feel that I can have a more direct impact on the student experiences, on their success, and making it easier to navigate through financial aid, registration, and things like that. It was, it is professionally one of the best feelings I could experience. One of the best feelings I could experience professionally, is to be on the front-line, and take a student from A to Z without them really even noticing that’s what I was trying to do.

Pattern Three: Continuum of Service

In conversations with participants about serving students in the new integrated model, front-line staff appeared to develop a new method of serving students. Multiple participants spoke about their desire to give students “A to Z” service. When asked to describe what “A to Z” service means, Martha spoke with passion about the philosophy at her institution:

Maybe a student thinks they have a question about financial aid, but really when we begin looking into their question, we find out there was an error in their registration that is causing issues with their financial aid. I get enjoyment from kind of anticipating problems like that, and it keeps them from getting frustrated and coming back multiple times.

As our conversation continued, Martha talked about how training had given them a greater understanding of the entire process; and, as a byproduct, the ability to look down the road and help students with all potential issues. Using the alphabet analogy Martha employed, I believe participants look at service in an integrated model like a continuum, with “Z” being the likely conclusion to service. If a student begins the transaction with a front-line student services professional at the letter “D”, the front-line staff believes it is their role to take the student to the likely conclusion of “Z”.

The continuum of service provides staff a better understanding of the entire process, affords front-line staff the ability to provide better service to students, allows for better interoffice collaboration, and develops a sense of team that ultimately makes the integrated model successful for serving students.

Over the course of interviews with front-line staff, participants described various revelations about how the integrated model gave them the ability to serve students in the integrated model. For example, Noah described the positive experience of moving into his new role in the integrated model of service:

I think the transition was actually very positive because it opened us up to actually understanding more of the big picture and working with other departments. We were really closed off in the old model, but now we have the opportunity to engage with students more and help them to better resolutions to their questions.

I asked Noah if understanding the entire process had any immediate benefits. He spoke with a confident tone when he responded:

Once we had a better understanding of the entire process, we knew the offices we could work with to help students. We had gone through cross-training with them, so we like knew more people. It was a lot easier to work with each other. We felt that we could run across the hall and ask a question face-to-face, or pick up the phone, because we've been through the training together now.

Kylie described a similar experience at her institution about collaborating with other offices. *"Our leadership encourages us to collaborate and break down old silo's, so we're more on the same page. I really feel like everybody is a little more open to say, 'hey let's get you to the right place' rather than, 'just have a seat and wait.'"*

I pushed Kylie for more information about collaborating with other offices and she replied thoughtfully:

I feel like if I have a student that has a problem, I'm going to financial aid and say, "Hey hold my hand, walk me through this so I can go back and get this student's paperwork figured out." Or I'm going to go to Noah and say, "What can I do for this student...is a payment plan an option?" I may even feel comfortable enough to take the student to the Business Office to say, "We're going to figure this out." I just don't think I would have done that in the past.

I asked Ranae if she felt closer to her colleagues after the transition:

The people who were here during the transition, we have different kinds of relationships. Like, we are closer. We just, I feel like I know them in a different capacity. It's very much like, we're all in this together, we all went through the transition together, so it's just kind of bound us even tighter, and you feel more comfortable with those people.

Juanita believed the new model allows for better collaboration on her campus as well, and commented:

Everybody has their expertise, and then we'll be like, okay let's make sure to answer all of their questions, so let's get Matt, Bill, Freddy, or Martha, I mean anybody might have a little bit more knowledge. It's just been a positive; we help each other out.

The participants felt they had a better understanding of the entire student process and a deeper sense of collaboration with other departments on campus. Given these two revelations, a direct impact was that front-line staff now felt they had the ability to provide better service to students.

Jill and Renessa, who both had negative feelings about the transition to an integrated model when it was announced on their campus, displayed an awareness about the transition in our final interview. Jill stated matter-of-factly: *"I actually felt like I was giving far better customer service from the first student I seen with the new setup. Students even mentioned how much they like not being shoved around from office to office and liked the new atmosphere,"* while Renessa pointed out: *"Now that I see the finished product I think it was absolutely necessary and it's good; we serve students better than we did before."*

In his last interview, Noah and I discussed his ability to serve students, specifically in the new model. When I asked if he felt better about serving students, he replied:

I actually have the opportunity to serve students way better because we don't just point them down the hall and say, 'we don't do that, you'll have to go to another office.' We can probably answer a majority of the questions right now when they come to us, and if we can't, we know who to contact to get the answer. There was enough cross-training to go around to give us basic knowledge of just about everything.

Other participants revealed additional benefits to having a better understanding of the continuum of service. For example, Scott noted:

...a lot of times students are sent to the integrated student services center by someone on campus, and they're not really sure why they're here. So, our ability to serve students is greatly improved because since we know the whole process, we know what questions to ask, even if the student isn't really sure why they're visiting us. That's significantly improved our service to students.

Jackie divulged a similar revelation

One thing we learned was that when a student came in and asked a question about classes, we would also automatically check their financial aid and their bill. A lot of times we found students didn't have that stuff ready to go, and even though it wasn't the reason they came to see us, we asked about it, and that was beneficial for the student.

In conversations about the continuum of service, staff appeared to be cognizant of a trend that allowed them to serve students better in the new model of service. Front-line staff described observable behaviors from colleagues that could be described as teamwork. Teamwork is defined as the combined action of a group of people, especially when effective and efficient. Matt spoke with emotion about his immediate co-workers at his institution:

This transition has very much brought us together as a unit. We all wear that badge, that we are here to serve students together, especially 'the original four' that made the transition together. We were here on Day One; we didn't have computers yet, but our doors were open, trying to figure this whole thing out. The strength in our relationship professionally, just keeps getting stronger and stronger.

Freddy also touched upon the theme of teamwork in his final interview:

So my relationship here, we are like a family. We can rely on each other; we can be open about topics. It's nice to have that support, you know someone to talk to. We can go to anyone in the office, and for me that's an awesome feeling.

Bill added to the conversation about a sense of team, stating:

I mentioned earlier that everyone has an open door in terms of questions. We help each other day-by-day, hour-by-hour, and I would say that maybe one-in-five interactions I have with students I will go and check with someone else. Even if I'm ninety-nine percent sure, I want to be one hundred, and I have five people on my team that are all willing to help out.

Bianca and Karla tried to support each other at their institution in the new model of service. Bianca shared: *"We're all on the same team. We just help each other. My co-worker Karla is the same way, she's always there for me when I have questions. We have each other's back."*

Shelle talked about the family atmosphere of the front-line staff that made the transition:

We leaned on each other a lot. I mean, there's so much information being thrown at you so fast and some people thrive and some people don't. I happen to like that environment, but some don't and I just think we leaned on each other. When someone wasn't getting it, we jump in and help. Like I said, it's a second family and everybody handled it really well.

For participants of this study, both previous and current roles factor into the service front-line staff were able to provide to students. In the traditional model of service, the focus of service is on the front-line staff developing expertise surrounding one task and delivering that knowledge singularly to students who approach them with questions. If the student inquired about a topic outside of their scope of knowledge, front-line staff were trained to send students away to another office without an answer or potential solution to their issue.

In the integrated model, front-line staff are cross-trained to be able to serve students across multiple bodies of knowledge. When a question arises that they are unsure of how to answer, the front-line staff are trained to engage subject matter experts within their division, research and attain the information, then deliver that information to the student. The front-line staff becomes the individual that does the research instead of the student. The integrated model provides for collaboration between offices and teamwork among colleagues provides a platform to serve students in an efficient manner.

Summary

The themes and fundamental patterns discussed in this chapter revealed the transition experience for front-line student services staff making the transition to an integrated model of service at five institutions of higher education in the Midwest. Participants described various experiences related to moving out, moving in and moving through transition, including feelings and attitudes about being notified about the transition, surviving the training process of being cross-trained in preparation of serving students in the new model, and emerging from training into a new role and new method of serving students. Front-line staff spoke to their mixed feelings about being notified about the transition. Some participants were frustrated by the traditional model of service, but were confident in their current role. That led to feelings of fear about the transition away from comfortable roles.

During the latter part of the study, many front-line staff began to appreciate the integrated model of service in addition to recognize that it afforded them an opportunity to deliver more efficient service to students while coming together as a unit to support each other as teammates and co-workers. Chapter 6 provides a synthesis of the findings and the research questions posed in Chapter 1. It also discusses the implications for practice, addresses the limitations, and provides recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 6. CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This study examined how front-line student services staff experience transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service. Chapter 1 examined why institutions of higher education make the choice to transition from traditional models of student service to integrated models. This question inspired the undertaking of this research study. Chapter 2 presented literature examining the topic of customer service in higher education in addition to Schlossberg's Theory of transition as a conceptual framework. The chapter also provided a review of the literature that included the history of the traditional model of student service, the emerging model of integrated student services, and the topic of higher education as a competitive marketplace.

The research methodology was outlined in Chapter 3, while Chapter 4 provided a description of participants and their experience in higher education before transitioning to an integrated model of student service. Chapter 5 introduced detailed themes and patterns emerging from information provided by participant interviews and observations. This chapter synthesizes findings by comparing them to the original research questions posed in the 1st chapter. Implications for policy and practice, and recommendations for future research as also presented in this final chapter.

Conclusions

The purpose of this comparative case study was to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services at five separate institutions of higher education. Following a comprehensive examination of the literature, it appears this is the first study addressing front-

line student services staff experiencing transition into an integrated model of student services. This research study was framed by three fundamental questions.

Question One: What strategies and support systems were utilized by front-line staff making the transition from a traditional model of student service to an integrated model of student service?

The first research question was answered by the themes and patterns that emerged during this study. The findings of this qualitative case study suggested front-line staff utilized multiple strategies and support systems while making the transition from the traditional model. The overarching theme that emerged was that front-line staff viewed the transition as *survival mode*. The findings also revealed that participants developed strategies to support each other during the transition in addition to receiving support from the institution. The patterns that support this theme include supporting each other in a community of practice and training strategies.

Participants at all five institutions of higher education in this study entered the transition to an integrated model from previous roles that were narrow in scope and required a depth of knowledge to accomplish the daily duties of the position. While each participant had his or her own unique set of circumstances entering into the transition, all felt a set of mixed emotions that included feelings of excitement, fear, anxiety, confusion, and an overall uncertainty about their role as the process to transition to the new model began.

Tina, from Urban Community College, described the feeling of the experience of *survival mode* as she navigated the transition:

My experience can only be described as entering a state of survival. Making the transition was extremely difficult. There were times we didn't understand why we were making the change, were asked to take on new roles, went through a ton of training, but the thing that got us through the most was supporting each other (Tina, Interview 1).

Multiple participants discussed the importance of supporting each other during the transition as a key to surviving the transition to an integrated model. Support was provided in multiple methods by participants as they observed colleagues who appeared to need assistance with the transition. One strategy and support system shared by multiple participants was the concept of *checking-in*. Many of the participants spoke about ending up in the parking lot encouraging one another and listening to concerns about how the transition was progressing.

Developing camaraderie around the stress of the transition seemed to bring the participants closer together as a unit. They began to bond and feel like a community as they approached the transition as an opportunity to share knowledge about their areas of expertise with each other:

The camaraderie between the people that worked on the front line was very good. We did feel like we could help each other because we had knowledge from different offices. That really helped us through the transition (Tina, Interview 2).

If the participants encountered students with questions they could not answer, they would lean on other front-line staff to utilize their area of expertise to serve the student. Many participants made a point to mention they would ask a colleague, who was also making the transition, questions where they were uncertain of an answer. *“You’re here with your expertise and they’re here with their expertise and together we feed off each other and learn from each other” (Juanita, Interview 2).*

Participants quickly came to know each other’s strengths. They had an understanding that they all came from different departments within their division and brought a unique set of knowledge to the new model of service. The participants in this study identified early in

the transition the benefits of colleagues with subject matter expertise in an area where they would also develop proficiency.

Multiple participants shared feelings about *checking-in* and supporting each other as a phenomenon that “just happened” organically within the front-line staff. In particular, Noah shared a reaction to an inquiry about if supporting each other was a strategy that was planned. *“I don’t think we really thought we were using a strategy as we were helping each other. It just kind of happened”* (Noah, Interview 2).

In addition to supporting each other, participants experienced strategies and support systems provided by the institutions of higher education where transition occurred. In particular, institutions provided several methods of training including, classroom training, developing written procedures, shadowing programs, and ad hoc trainings. The narratives of front-line staff in this study suggest institutions that employ multiple methods of training create an environment that fosters positive transition.

Prairie Horizon Community College participants shared an enriching transition experience that prepared them for the rigors of operating in the integrated model of student service. The first step in the training process was to be given an overview of the model of service and what the goals were for the level of service Prairie Horizon aimed to provide. Participants from Prairie Horizon described the details of the training as a holistic view of what students need to be successful. The sessions were in a computer lab and included the ability to see the student information system on a video screen that provided an opportunity for the front-line staff to understand how to complete transactions in the system all at the same time. Front-line staff believed this method developed consistency in how processes were completed.

Prairie Horizons then distributed written information. Participants used the binders of documentation during classroom sessions to develop expertise on multiple processes. A second use of the written documentation began to emerge as participants began serving students. Many participants used the binders of information as a resource to verify information they were delivering to students within the new integrated model of service.

In addition to classroom training and written documentation, Prairie Horizons took part in shadowing programs. All of the front-line staff making the transition were scheduled to spend time with staff in each home office learning processes they would utilize with students as they transitioned to the front-line in the integrated model. Shadowing is a combination of observing a subject matter expert performing their role with the ability to ask follow-up questions to further clarify processes to assist students.

Subject matter experts can further enhance the experience by sharing the reason a process is completed a certain way so that the front-line staff has an appreciation for how all processes are interconnected and how making a change in one area can make an impact for the student in another area. Participants who experienced shadowing programs developed a well-rounded concept of how each process operated within the scope of an integrated student services model.

A final strategy utilized with participants was the addition of ad hoc trainings. As front-line staff began to serve students during the transition and struggle serving students on a particular topic, the institution would design a training session to further assist them in the transition. The ad hoc training may be in one of many formats including classroom sessions, shadowing exercises, or even in written communication to clarify a process.

The dynamic nature of transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service provided a fascinating backdrop to examine the journey that each participant experienced. In particular, front-line staff that experienced multiple strategies and support systems developed a deep, nuanced appreciation of the transition process and the level of service needed to assist students within the integrated model. However, front-line staff did not equate the strategies or support systems provided during transition to the topic of control reflected in the second question for the study.

Question Two: In what ways did staff perceive the control they had over their changing role during the transition?

Given the uncertainty that is inherent during a period of transition, how front-line staff perceive their level of control over their changing roles can have an impact on the outcome of the transition. Whether the position change is voluntary or involuntary, front-line staff may experience a variety of emotions such as excitement, fear, anxiety, or a sense of loss. Data from this case study suggest the perceived control front-line staff had over their changing role during the transition differed depending on if the transition was voluntary or involuntary.

Information provided by the participants in this study revealed two different methods of transition among the five institutions of higher education. Front-line staff at Urban Community College, Riverview University, Lakeview College, and Border Community College experienced involuntary transition. Participants at those four institutions were not given a choice about the upcoming transition and the new role they would play within the integrated model of student service. In contrast, the participants at Prairie Horizon Community College were notified that the student services division would be experiencing a

reorganization and the front-line staff would have the opportunity to apply for new positions in the integrated model of student service.

Participants that experienced voluntary transition shared feelings of comfort with the opportunity to view a position description for the new role. Having knowledge about the duties and expectations of the new position gave them the confidence to make a determination if they would submit an application. Front-line staff were able to assess if the position responsibilities were duties they were comfortable executing. After making the decision to seek a position in the new model of service, front-line staff went through the interview process where they were given a comprehensive explanation of the onboarding process, including the strategies and support systems that would be in place to assist in the transition. When they received an offer of employment for the new role in the integrated model, they had clear expectations of the role and how it fit into the new model of service. However, participants that experienced voluntary transition still reported anxiety over the change and reported a lack of control over portions of the transition. Even when the job change is voluntary, there is a process of mourning the old ways (Anderson et al., 2012).

Information provided by the participants from Prairie Horizons suggest that front-line staff were confident in their ability to execute the role assigned in the traditional model of service. Considered experts, they chose to exit the comfort zone of their role within the traditional model of service for a role with a broad set of expectations, goals, and responsibilities. While participants entered into the transition voluntarily, many reported that it was intimidating. In addition to feelings of intimidation, front-line staff shared feelings of excitement as they prepared to make the transition. It appeared staff visualized a fresh start within the new role. Additionally, they reported feeling energized and ready to absorb as

much as possible during the training for the new role. Having perceived control over the transition pushed front-line staff to look to anticipate collaborating with fellow colleagues who had made the voluntary transition to an integrated model.

On the contrary, participants at Urban Community College, Border Community College, Riverview University, and Lakeview College made involuntary transitions into the new model of service on their campuses. When the change is involuntary, the grief can be intense, much like losing a loved one (Anderson et al., 2012). Participants experiencing involuntary change shared feelings of fear, anxiousness, and a general sense of unhappiness. They did not perceive control over their transition process.

In initial interviews about being notified about the transition, front-line staff shared emotional illustrations of how the transition impacted them. Several participants shared stories of colleagues in tears due to the stress of moving out of a familiar position into a new role with unknown responsibilities. *“The news of the transition, it was kind of a shock because we didn’t know; it’s kind of shocking when you’re told you job is going to change”* (Tina, Interview 1). Other participants shared feelings of skepticism about the need to transition to a different model of service. Front-line staff asked questions about the logistics of the remodel; where offices would be located, how long would they be displaced, and what would happen to them during the transition. *“We were frustrated about the remodel. My office was not down on the ground floor, and then the rest of the offices were on the second floor. I felt like all I did, was go up and downstairs”* (Kylie, Interview 1).

Many of the participants who experienced involuntary transition were comfortable in their current role. They identified feelings of frustration about being notified they would have to learn how to answer questions from multiple offices, especially after how hard they had

worked to develop expertise in their current role. *“It took me eight years to gather all of that information and I worked so hard to get to that point. Then I heard we were transitioning to the integrated model and it kind of freaked me out a little bit”* (Shelle, Interview 1).

When participants were asked to make a change they did not understand or did not have control in developing, it left them feeling anxious and insecure. Without perceived control, the participants lacked the confidence to implement new protocols, resisted change, and longed for the opportunity to return to old roles and responsibilities. Study participants at institutions that employed involuntary transition reported reluctance about the concept of transition in general. It appeared that reluctance developed from a lack of shared information from the institution about why the change was necessary. In addition, front-line staff were unsure of their ability to execute new duties in the new model of service. Participants also shared a fear of how the transition would impact their position. They asked questions about the motive behind the change. Was the institution transitioning to a new model to downsize? The front-line staff were anxious about losing their jobs at their college or university. *“It was a little stomach wrenching. There was a lot of fear”* (Jenny, Interview 1).

The stress surrounding an involuntary transition had a negative impact on immediate ability to serve students. The staff felt pressure to serve students in the new model, but still did not have clear expectations of how their role fit into the new model of service. *“I think what I remember the most was the frustrations of the student during the transition. They were frustrated trying to figure out where to get the services they need during transition”* (Ranae, Interview 1). The perceived lack of control during involuntary transition appeared to lengthen the time frame for front-line staff to transition into their role successfully. Participants were able to serve students effectively within the new model, but the involuntary

nature of the notification of transition seemed to delay embracing the training process and assimilating into their new role in the integrated model of service.

Overall, observations of front-line staff transitions revealed that participants who experienced voluntary transition perceived they had more control over the process. While perceived control did not eliminate feelings of fear and anxiety about leaving the comfort of old roles, it did foster an environment where colleagues supported each other through development and implementation of multiple support systems. The connection co-workers made during the transition assisted in the development of a culture of care at Prairie Horizon. *“Our supervisor explained to me we want like a culture of care. We want to be student focused, and we want to make sure they have the best experience we can give them”* (Martha, Interview 2).

The culture of care is a support system where front-line staff provide focused customer service to students. In addition, observations showed the culture of care manifested itself as a support system for front line staff through the transition. The support participants provided each other during the transition laid the foundation for a positive learning environment and the ability to provide quality service to students. The development of this perspective and its connection to issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and service quality is the final question guiding the study.

Question Three: How did the reorganization impact issues of motivation, satisfaction, productivity, and service quality?

The third question manifested from assumptions that the transition experience from a traditional model to an integrated model of service would have an impact on the quality of service a front-line student services professional would be able to deliver to students. It was evident that participants in this study survived the transition and began to deliver quality

service to students. At the beginning of the study, the participants experienced mixed emotions about making the transition to a reorganized model of student service. Many were uncertain about how the transition would impact their positions, while others were excited about the reorganization and viewed it as an opportunity to grow professionally.

As the study progressed, many participants began to develop strategies of support that laid the foundation for a positive transition experience. The emergence of that phenomena created a culture of care that fostered an environment where front-line staff were able to develop a continuum of service model that appears to be associated with participants' positive professional development. Many participants, influenced by a positive transition experience, reported that their new positions were rewarding and fulfilling.

In written reflections and initial interviews, front-line staff shared thick and rich descriptions of how their journey from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service commenced. On one hand, several participants shared feelings of fear and anxiety about the pending transition. On the other hand, several front-line staff were excited about the transition and viewed the reorganization as an opportunity to grow professionally.

Initially during the study, it was not clear if the front-line staff making the transition would be motivated to provide quality service to students. Participants, in many cases, did not have a clear understanding of why the transition was necessary. Front-line staff were uncertain of how the transition would impact their positions. As the transition progressed, participants revealed a shift in perspective about the concept of the integrated model of service. While some participants were still skeptical of the philosophy behind the integrated model, others could begin to see value in developing knowledge to serve students in multiple areas.

The participants grew closer with colleagues making the journey to an integrated model. *“I do think that maybe the transition brought us closer and we became a stronger team in and out of the office”* (Jill, Interview 3). Many participants spoke about the phenomenon of supporting each other through transition. Originally developed as a coping mechanism to survive reorganization, it quickly transformed into a catalyst in the training process. Participants began to collaborate, develop a sense of team, and grow professionally. Moving through transition to an integrated model provided participants with feelings of empowerment. Many front-line staff shared satisfaction with developing an understanding of the entire process as a benefit to being cross-trained for their new role in the integrated student services center.

During interviews conducted later in the study, participants shared a deep understanding of the process to serve students in the integrated model after completing the transition. When front-line staff have an understanding of the entire process, it allows them to anticipate potential issues for students and assume the role of advocate. *“I think the transition was very positive because it opened us up to actually understand the big picture on working with other departments, that gives us the opportunity to engage with students and help them through more situations”* (Noah, Interview 3).

When front-line staff can begin to work with students at any point in the process and take them to completion, it is a quality service experience.

In the beginning there were mixed reviews. Some students didn't trust our ability to answer all of their questions. Slowly, as students had positive experiences with us, they began to tell their friends and by word of mouth our volume increased. That gave us a sense of empowerment. I know that I began to carry myself a little differently on campus. I felt that I was trusted by students to be able to help them with that they needed. (Amanda, Interview 3)

That continuum of service is a productive method for front-line staff and participants shared feelings of empowerment and fulfillment when they have mastered the ability to deliver that level of service.

Learning that front-line staff transitioning from a traditional to an integrated model are satisfied and motivated to provide quality service to students is an exciting finding. Front-line staff value working in an integrated model because the model is very student-focused. *“One of the things I really value about working here is that, at least everyone in student services, is focused on students and at the end of the day, you can see the model benefits students”* (Jackie, Interview 3).

It appears that the transition experience among participants concluded in a satisfying new role for front-line staff. The new role in the integrated model allowed participants a platform to provide high quality service for students start to finish.

We are here to provide them help with everything from beginning to end. It’s (the integrated model) just conceptually smarter and more streamlined, and I think it’s really important to be able to tell the student you can help them with a question and not have to pass them off to someone else. Many of our students aren’t even sure what questions to ask or where to start. That’s what we are here for. (Ranae, Interview 3)

As front-line staff commented on their transitions (negative and positive), a pattern of a culture of care appeared to emerge which embodied the journey from traditional model of service to integrated model. *“We want like a culture of care, and we want to be student focused more than procedure focused. At the end of the day, the student is our customer and that’s who we are working for; we want to make sure that they have the best experience we can give them”* (Martha, Interview 2). Many of the participants viewed the culture of care and the development of a continuum of service model as strategies used by front-line staff to

provide service to students. However, I believe it was also a strategy to support each other as participants moved out, moved in, and moved through transition.

Conceptual Framework

Returning to Schlossberg's Theory of Transition, the conceptual framework outlined in the second chapter of this study, the themes and patterns emerging from participants are added to provide a detailed framework (Figure 6.1). The conceptual framework begins with moving out of old roles, routines, and expectations. The patterns that undergird the theme "we want to improve, but don't want to change" appear below as building blocks supporting the overarching theme.

Front-line staff expressed frustration with the current model of service and their ability to serve students within the traditional model of service. They were able to identify a problem and wanted to improve, but were comfortable with their role in the traditional model. When administration began to talk about a new model of service, there were mixed feelings about the announcement. While some participants could see positive aspects about the pending change, most front-line staff fostered feelings of anxiety and insecurity.

A central pattern in the moving out phase with participants was fear of the unknown. Participants shared feelings of uncertainty about how transition would impact their position with the institution, in addition to a general lack of understanding about the expectations of their new role and the ability to execute their new role. The process of moving in required staff to "process the announcement of transition," which was described by one participant as entering survival mode. This theme is placed vertically below suggesting it is the next step on the path of transition for front-line student services professionals. Participants in this study did not have a common experience about being notified about the transition. Participants

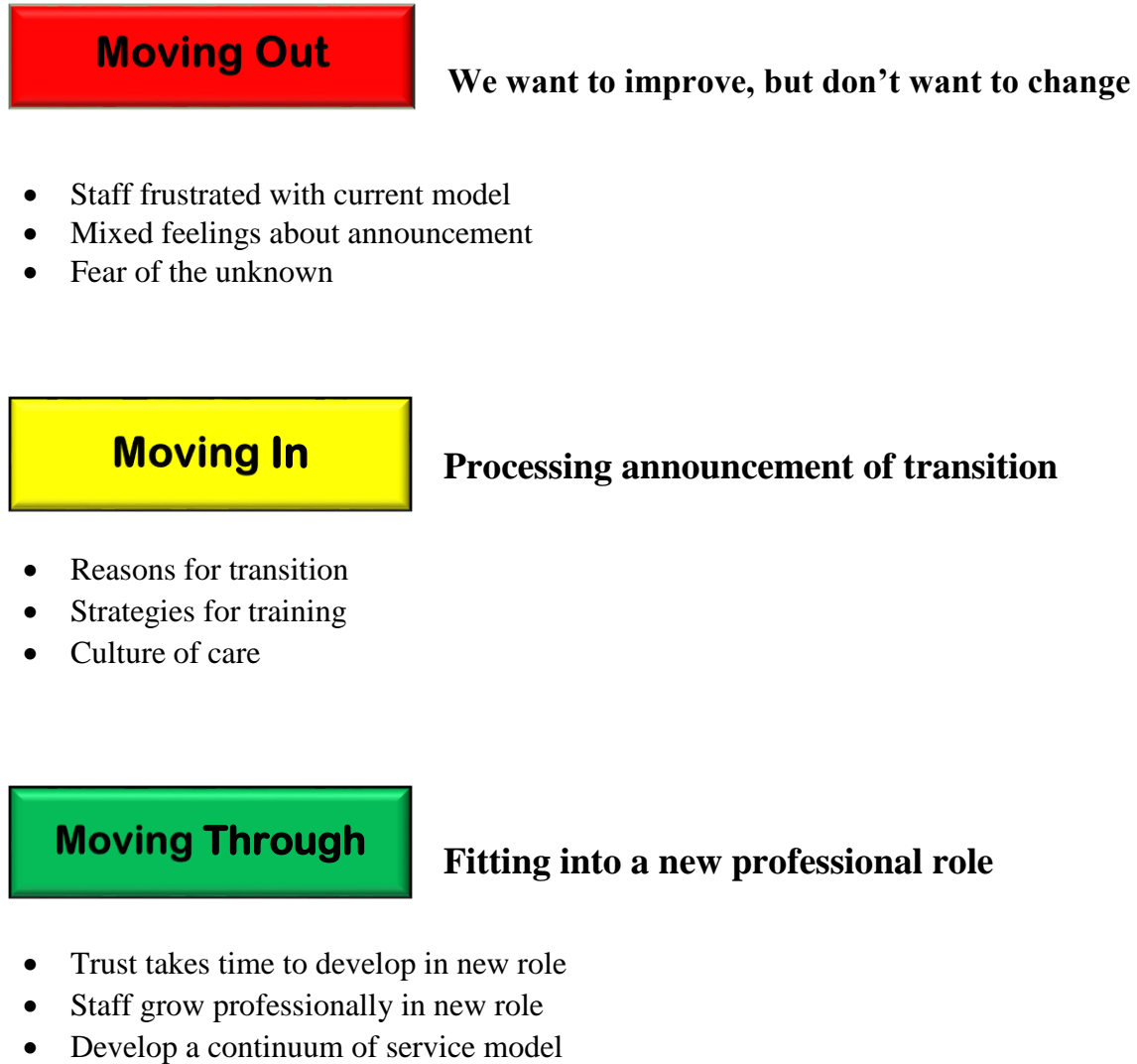


Figure 6.1. Conceptual framework for adding observed patterns

were not provided clear reasons for transition at all institutions. Some institutions were very clear about the purpose of the transition to an integrated model of service, while others did not provide a high level of reasoning, thus leaving front-line staff yearning for more information.

Regardless of the level of clarity surrounding the move, institutions began to implement strategies for training participants. As training programs progressed front-line staff began to develop a culture of care as a method of service to students. Many of the participants viewed the culture of care as a strategy to provide service to students, but it also emerged as a method of supporting each other in a community of practice. Moving through transition, the last theme in this study, frames the identity development of front-line student services professionals as they attempt to “fit” into a new professional role.

As participants emerged from training for their new roles in the integrated model of service, they began to understand it would take time for students and staff from other departments to develop trust in their abilities to provide services. Front-line staff began to recognize they had grown professionally by adding knowledge about multiple processes to their skillset. As trust established, the participants in this study reported a sense of empowerment and pleasure around development of the ability to provide service to students. Feeling comfortable with the entire process, participants developed a method of service that I have coined a continuum of service. Front-line staff spoke with passion about the philosophy of providing “A to Z” service with students. The interesting question outside the scope of this study is whether the model can be duplicated on other campuses, providing professional growth for more front-line student services professionals in the future.

Implications for Practice

This study provides student services administrators a model of the transition experience of front-line staff from a traditional model to an integrated model of student service. Based on the findings from this study, there are several implications for practice that should be considered.

Student services administrators at institutions of higher education should consider the transition strategy that will be utilized prior to announcing plans to implement an integrated model of service. For example, Urban Community College, Border Community College, Riverview University, and Lakeside Liberal Arts College, utilized involuntary transition with front-line staff. Participants at those four institutions were not given a choice about the upcoming transition and the new role they would play within the integrated model of student service. Participants that experienced involuntary transitions shared feelings of fear, anxiousness, and general sense of unhappiness. When the change is involuntary, the grief can be intense, much like losing a loved one (Anderson et al., 2012). Participants who experienced involuntary transition shared a lack of confidence to implement new expectations and initially resisted the change.

To the contrary, participants who experienced voluntary change perceived they had more control over the process. While perceived control did not fully eliminate fear and anxiety about transitioning to new roles, it gave front-line staff a clear vision of the new model and the expectations of the role they would assume. Institutions that are considering a change to an integrated model should consider examining the positions that will be needed in the new model of service, writing position descriptions, and allowing interested staff to apply for the openings. Findings in this study suggest that will lead to a positive transition experience and front-line staff that find the work rewarding and fulfilling.

It would be difficult to find a college leader who does not support the notion that it is important for student services to assist students well. Unfortunately, many leaders in higher education are looking for a one-size-fits-all model for integrating student services and tightening the connections between the various subsystems without regard for institutional culture (Gill, 2009). Integrating student services functions at an institution of higher education relies on executive buy-in and support from the beginning of the planning through the completion of the project.

Nevertheless, support does not end when the doors to new model open. The long-term success of the integrated model depends on continued support from not only executive leadership, but from the leaders of the functional areas involved in the center and the individual staff tasked with either front end customer service or the subject matter experts that remain in the home offices to be resources for the front line staff and to complete the processing of student information. Any campus considering a switch to an integrated model must have knowledge of their campus culture, understand why believe that they need to make the transition to an integrated model, know what issues on their campus are they attempting to address with the change, identify potential road blocks to success, and discern what staff need to be involved in the planning, implementation, and continued management of an integrated model. Providing appropriate information at the appropriate time creates an atmosphere of openness and transparency (Gill, 2009).

Additionally, institutions need to know who will be champions of the proposed change throughout the planning, implementation, and marketing of the new model of integrated student services to students and staff. Finally, there should be executive level buy-in throughout all phases of the project. The implementation team will be able to guide staff

more efficiently through transition if it is common knowledge that transition is the desire of a chief executive.

Participants in this study developed deep and nuanced knowledge about the enrollment processes at their institutions during the training process. The capacity to learn multiple processes through training, retain the knowledge, and then disseminate it to students, and anticipate any problems students may encounter are required skills for front-line student services staff. When student services practitioners are looking for candidates that would excel on the front-line, there are several characteristics that could reveal a quality candidate. The staff member should have the capacity to learn multiple college processes, be friendly, courteous, thorough and student-focused rather than procedure focused. Finally, front-line staff should have personalities that thrive on student contact. A student service professional that is energized by working with the public and taking questions to resolution is an ideal candidate to transition to a front-line role in an integrated model of student service.

Any institution considering an integrated model of service should examine the philosophy to be utilized in a transition. After completing this study, it is apparent that involuntary transition is a source of tension for front-line staff during the process to move to a new role. In this study, it was a negative factor in being notified of the transition and kept front-line staff focused on items like physical work space instead of cross-training and service to students. Voluntary transition, based on this study, provided participants with transparency about the roles and expectations of the position, why the change in service model was necessary, and a road map for cross-training and support systems.

Institutions considering the transition to an integrated model should determine whether the voluntary or involuntary philosophy is appropriate for their campus culture. One

of the considerations to determine which philosophy of transition best suits their campus should be leadership strategy. Campus executives should examine what leadership style matches the chosen transition philosophy. Leaders implementing involuntary change will need to be prepared to work with staff that are initially resistant to change and unsure of their ability to transition to roles with expanded responsibilities. More importantly, administrators leading involuntary change will need to be prepared provide a clear vision for the expectations of roles that new staff members will execute in the integrated model of service. This could alleviate some of the negative implications of involuntary change and pave the road for a smooth transition.

Recommendations for Future Research

While this study provided valuable insight into the transition experience of front-line student services professionals, there are several areas that warrant further examination. The recommendations for future research related to integrated models of student service include several topics.

A research study from the qualitative paradigm should be conducted to determine if an integrated student services approach improved the overall student experience. Although not an inquiry of interest in this study, integrated models of student services have been in operation on college campuses for more than a decade. Investigating students who had completed degree programs on campuses where integrated models of service in place could provide deeper insight about the model and if it contributes to a positive student experience.

A qualitative inquiry focusing on the administrators that have led institutions through the transition to an integrated model. Educational leaders have been engaged in creating integrated models of student service on college campuses for more than a decade. A study investigating the lived experiences of higher education professional responsible for guiding

institutions through the transition to an integrated model could provide best practices for the profession of student affairs.

An in-depth case study to determine if there is a positive impact on student retention and completion rates at institutions that employ an integrated model of student service would also be valuable. In considering how different models of student service shape educational experiences, much could be learned through studying the effectiveness of the integrated model of student service in relation to retention and completion. Does the model of service have any impact on the student and their ability to complete on campuses that utilize an integrated model?

A qualitative study focused on educational attainment of front-line student service professionals who operate in an integrated model of service is another area of suggested future investigation. Does educational attainment of front-line staff correlate to higher levels of service quality for students? Although educational attainment was not a unit of analysis for this study, differences in ability to transition smoothly between those with post-high school credentials and those with only a high school diploma suggests the need for future studies to explore transition experiences of front-line staff based on educational attainment.

The qualitative case study methodology utilized in this study offered a detailed explanation of the transition experience of twenty front-line student services staff that had made the journey from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services. The field of student services may benefit from a quantitative inquiry that generates generalizable findings around how front-line staff transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student services. While the dependability of quantitative inquiry is not absolute, it is

statistically probable. Generating data that can be analyzed statistically has the potential to deliver measurable evidence to the topic of transition in student services.

How does removing student contact from home offices impact back office student services professionals? An integrated model of student service removes the customer service responsibilities from the home office and enables subject matter experts to focus on the processing of student information without interruption from student traffic. When back-office student services professionals have experienced long periods of little to no student interaction, are their customer service skills diminished? These individuals are vital to students receiving information in a timely fashion from the institution. Future studies should attempt to collect data from back office student services professionals about their experience after a transition to an integrated model of student service.

During the course of this study, the researcher became aware of front-line staff who had their position eliminated or were re-assigned due to a shift to an integrated model of student service. A qualitative inquiry should be undertaken to capture the experiences of staff who did not make the transition due to resource allocation during a change in service model. This examination could be beneficial to higher education administrators contemplating a shift in service model on their campus.

The decision to use Schlossberg's Theory of Transition provided for findings describing the transition experience for front-line student services staff. However, it may be possible to generate additional findings utilizing an alternative change model as the framework to guide the study. A future study utilizing Kotter's eight-stage change model (Kotter, 2012) may provide insight into how institutions of higher education can successfully make the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of student service.

Last, a qualitative study may be warranted to determine if student services professionals working at their alma mater provide higher levels of service quality for students. Although not an inquiry of interest at the beginning of this study, this examination provided a few illustrations of examples where alumni displayed a dynamic ability to adapt to a new model of service. In addition, those working for their alma mater appeared to have more flexibility for change and a sense of loyalty to their employer. Future studies should attempt to collect data from student services professionals employed by their alma mater.

Reflection

This study was developed from my passion about student services in higher education. While my graduate committee approved the study in November of 2016, it truly started at the University of Northern Iowa, on a warm summer afternoon in 2000 when I developed a presentation for new student orientation that focused on educating students and their parents about the registration, billing, and financial aid processes. I had an incredibly difficult time locating the information to put together my presentation, and I kept thinking as an employee of the university, if I had that much trouble locating information, how hard was it for students and their parents?

Eight years later I was working for the Iowa College Access Network and saw a position description for an opening at Kirkwood Community College in the *Cedar Rapids Gazette*. The advertisement described a position that would create a model of serving students through the enrollment services (financial aid, registration, and student accounts) process at the college. It sounded like an exciting opportunity, and I began to think it might be a solution to the problem I encountered several years earlier when trying to create the presentation at the University of Northern Iowa. I was lucky enough to interview for that position and be hired at Kirkwood to lead their One Stop operation.

The decision to accept that position and work in the One Stop sparked an interest in models of integrated student service that has remained with me now for nearly a decade. The investigation into this topic of study continued as I was selected by Kirkwood to represent Student Services in the Community College Leadership Initiative Consortium (CLIC) in 2009. Dr. Larry Ebbers encouraged me to use CLIC as a platform to launch into the completion of a Master's degree that I had started in 1995. After completion of the Master's at Iowa State, Dr. Ebbers convinced me to continue my studies into the Higher Education, Ph.D. program. While integrated student service centers were a passion of mine, I had not considered it as a possibility as a research topic until I entered classes in 2012.

Research for this case study took place in the Spring of 2017 at five separate institutions of higher education, three community colleges and two four-year, private liberal arts institutions. While all the colleges were structured differently and had contrasting demographics, they shared a common experience; they had made the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model.

Following the conclusion of data collection, I began the process of data analysis. A trend that emerged from the data, that did not fit into the conceptual framework, was a majority of front-line staff at one institution employed in their integrated student services center were graduates from that institution. A deeper dive into the interviews and written reflections of those individuals revealed an interesting phenomenon. Prairie Horizons Community College has developed a process that could be a model for growing student services professionals in higher education.

The process begins when a student is hired into a work-study position while enrolled in their degree program. While the student is enrolled, they are learning a process as a work-

study student gaining valuable experience about a process and the college culture of serving students. When they complete their Associate's degree, if they enroll in a Bachelor's program at an institution close to their campus, the student is then hired on as a part-time employee at Prairie Horizons, continuing their training on processes within their integrated student services center.

This is a remarkable method of assisting students with developing a skill (no one majors in student services) while earning part-time wages to assist with college costs to finish their Bachelor's. Finally, when they complete their Bachelor's degree, if there is a full-time position open at Prairie Horizons, they encourage them to apply. If hired, Prairie Horizons now has a new full-time employee who has worked for them in a student and part-time capacity for up to five years. The knowledge these individuals bring to the table on day one of their new position, in addition to their experience as a student at Prairie Horizons, gives them the opportunity to relate to current student issues and provide service to them in a culture of care. After they have been employed, Prairie Horizons is encouraging further pursuit of education in a Master's program. I believe this is an advantageous method for growing future student service administrators in higher education. As I look into the future and consider a research agenda, I am interested in exploring the model at Prairie Horizons in greater detail.

REFERENCES

- Anderson, M. L., Goodman, J., Schlossberg, N. K. (2012). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking schlossberg's theory with practice in a diverse world* (4th ed.). New York, NY: Springer Publishing.
- Anfara, V. A., Brown, K. M., & Mangione, T.L. (2002). Qualitative analysis on stage: Making the research process more public. *Educational researcher*, 31(7), 28-38.
- Ary, D., Jacobs, L. C., Razavieh, A., & Sorensen, C. (2006). *Introduction to research in education* (7th ed.). Belmont, CA: Thomson Wadsworth.
- Aubrey, B. & Tilliette, B. (1990). *Knowing and teaching: Action learning in the enterprise*. Paris: InterEditions.
- Beede, M., & Burnett, D. (1999). Planning for student services: Best practices for the 21st century. Ann Arbor, MI: Society for College and University Planning.
- Bejou, D. (2005, March/April). Treating students like customers. *Biz Ed Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.aacsb.edu/publications/Archives/marapr05-toc.asp>
- Bogdan, R., & Biklen, S. (1998). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theory and methods*. Needham Heights, Allyn & Bacon.
- Bogdan, R. C., & Biklen, S. K. (2007). *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). New York, NY: Pearson Education, Inc.
- Bolman, L. G., & Deal, T. E. (2017). *Reframing organizations: Artistry, choice, and leadership*. New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Bowser, C. D. (2011, October). *Removing the walls: A case study of culture change and improving effectiveness*. Minneapolis, MN: NACUBO Institute for Student Services Professionals Annual Conference.
- Boyd, R. (2012). Customer service in higher education: Finding a middle ground. *The Mentor An Academic Advising Journal*. Retrieved from <https://dus.psu.edu/mentor/2012/06/customer-service-in-higher-education/>
- Brenders, D. A., Hope, P., & Ninnan, A. (1999). A systemic, student-centered study of university service. *Research in Higher Education*, 40(6), 665-685.
- Bussolari, C. J., & Goodell, J. A. (2009). Chaos theory as a model for life transitions counseling: Nonlinear dynamics and life's changes. *Journal of Counseling and Development*, 87, 98-107.
- Buultjens, M., & Robinson, P. (2011). Enhancing aspects of the higher education student experience. *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 33(4), 337-346.

- Chambers, J. (1987, March). Untitled Remarks, Opening Session. Presented at ACPA/NASPA Joint Conference, Chicago, IL. [Audiotape]
- Chitwood, J. P. (1996). Sensitizing community college personnel through customer service training. *Viewpoints*, 2, 128.
- Claus, F. (2007). Student-centered administrative services at the University of Pennsylvania. In N. Sinsabaugh (Ed.), *Student centered financial services: Innovations that succeed* (pp. 1-12). Washington, DC: National Association of College and University Business Officers.
- Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.
- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Qualitative inquiry & research design: Choosing among five approaches* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Cummins, J. (2007). University student financial services and cashier operations: A novel approach at the University of Illinois. In N. Sinsabaugh (Ed.), *Student centered financial services: Innovations that succeed* (pp.1-12). Washington, DC: National Association of College and University Business Officers.
- Delucchi, M., & Korgen, K. (2002). We're the customer: We pay the tuition. Student consumerism among undergraduate sociology majors. *Teaching Sociology*, 30(1), 100-107.
- Denzin, N., & Lincoln, Y. (2005). *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2008). Part I: Methods of collecting and analyzing empirical materials. In N. K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *Collecting and interpreting qualitative materials* (3rd Ed., pp. 45-55). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Dillon, K., & Sinsabaugh, N. (2007). *Student centered financial services: Innovations that succeed*. Washington, DC: National Association of College and University Business Officers.
- Draeger, J. (2008, July). Brad Honious gets it right with a one-stop shop. *Greentree Gazette*, 70-71.
- Ebbers, L., & Rivera, M. (2015). Preparation, challenges, and opportunities for student affairs professionals in the community college. In Tull, A., Kuk, L., & Dalpes, P. (2015). *Handbook for student affairs in community colleges*. Sterling, VA: Stylus Publishing.
- Esterberg, K. G. (2002). *Qualitative methods in social research*. Boston, MA: McGraw-Hill Companies.

- Evans, N. J., Forney, D. S., Guido, F., Patton, L. D., & Renn, K. A. (2010). *Student development in college: Theory, research, and practice* (2nd ed.). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Fisher, K. (2009). *Service on the community college campus: The millennial generation perspective*. Doctoral dissertation. Retrieved from ProQuest. (UMI 3355215)
- Gardner, L. (July 24, 2016). What a university can learn from Wegmans. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from <http://www.chronicle.com/article/What-a-University-Can-Learn/237240>
- Godwin, G. & Markham, W. (1996). First encounters of the bureaucratic kind: Early freshman experiences with a campus bureaucracy. *Journal of Higher Education*, 67(6), 660-691).
- Havarnek, J. E., & Brodwin, M. G. (1998). Restructuring universities and colleges: The student-focused paradigm. *Education*, 119(1), 115-120.
- Husserl, E. (2001). *Logical investigations*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Jones, S., Torres, V., & Arminio, J. (2006). *Negotiating the complexities of qualitative research in higher education: Fundamental elements and issues*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Kelderman, E. (2012, January 23). States push even further to cut spending on colleges. *The Chronicle of Higher Education*. Retrieved from http://chronicle.com/article/States-Push-Even-Further-to/130416/?sid=cc&utm_source=cc&utm_medium=en
- Kleinman, R. (1999). The reengineering of enrollment services: Four departments become one. In M. Beede & D. Burnett (Eds.), *Planning for student services: Best practices for the 21st century* (pp. 21-28). Ann Arbor, MI: Society for College and University Planning.
- Kramer, G. L. (2003). *Student academic services: An integrated approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Kotter, J. P. (2012). *Leading change*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Lewis, R. C., & Booms, B. H. (1983). The marketing aspects of service quality. In L. Berry, G. Shostak, & G. Upah (Eds.), *Emerging perspectives on services marketing* (pp. 99-107). Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association.
- Lichtman, M. (2006). *Qualitative research in education: A user's guide*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1985). *Naturalistic inquiry*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.

- Lomas, L. (2007). Are students customers? Perceptions of academic staff. *Quality in Higher Education*, 13(1), 31-44.
- Lonabocker, L. (2006). One-stop shop and virtual services. In B. Lauren (Ed.), *The registrar's guide: Evolving best practices in records and registration* (pp. 131-145). Washington DC: AACRAO.
- Manning, K., Kinzie, J., Schuh, J. (2014). *One size does not fit all: Traditional and innovative models of student affairs practice*. New York, NY: Routledge.
- Maxwell, J. A. (2013). *Qualitative research design: an interactive approach* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- McClellan, G. S., & Stringer, J. (2009). *The handbook of student affairs administration*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (1988). *Case study research in education: A qualitative approach*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). *Qualitative research in practice*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Miles, M. B., Huberman, A. M., & Saldana, J. (2014). *Qualitative data analysis: A methods sourcebook*. Beverly Hills, CA: Sage.
- Moustakas, C. (1994). *Phenomenological research methods*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Nealon, J. (2005). *College and university responsiveness to students-as-customers: The reorganization of service delivery in the enrollment service arena*. Doctoral dissertation (Order No. 3168038). Available from ProQuest Dissertations & Theses Global. (305457865). Retrieved from <https://search-proquest-com.proxy.lib.iastate.edu/docview/305457865?accountid=10906>
- Nealon, J. (2007). One-stop student service centers: Virtual and actual. In N. Sinsabaugh (Ed.), *Student centered financial services: Innovations that succeed* (pp.1-12). Washington, DC: National Association of College and University Business Officers.
- Oldfather, P., & West, J. (1994). Qualitative research as jazz. *Educational Researcher*, 23, 22-26.
- Owen, R., & Pekala, B. (2003). Student Financial Services. In G. L. Kramer (Ed.), *Student academic services: An integrated approach* (pp. 247-270). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Patton, M. (2002). *Qualitative evaluation and research methods*. Newbury Park, Sage.
- Robertson, J. (2003). *Knowledge management for front-line staff*. Online article: Retrieved from http://www.steptwo.com.au/papers/kmc_frontline/

- Schlossberg, N. K. (1984). *Counseling adults in transition: Linking practice with theory*. New York, NY: Springer.
- Schlossberg, N. K. (1989). *Overwhelmed: Coping with life's ups and downs*. Lexington, MA: Lexington Books.
- Schwartzman, R. (1995). Are students customers? The metaphoric mismatch between management and education. *Education*, 116.
- Scott, S. (1999). The academic as service provider: Is the customer "always right?" *Journal of Higher Education Policy & Management*, 21(2), 193.
- Seemiller, C., Grace, M. (2016). *Generation Z goes to college*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass
- Sines, R. G., & Duckworth, E. A. (1994). Customer service in higher education. *Journal of Marketing for Higher Education*, 5(2), 1-15.
- Stake, R. E. (1995). *The art of case study research*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2005). *Qualitative case studies*. In N.K. Denzin & Y. S. Lincoln (Eds.), *The Sage handbook of qualitative research* (3rd ed., pp. 443-466). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Stake, R. E. (2006). *Multiple case study analysis*. New York, NY: Guilford Press.
- Strauss, A., & Corbin, J. (1990). *Basic of qualitative research: Grounded theory procedures and techniques*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage.
- Supernatural Horror in Literature. (2016, April 1). In *Wikisource*. Retrieved 23:55, September 4, 2017, from: https://en.wikisource.org/w/index.php?title=Supernatural_Horror_in_Literature&oldid=6173986
- Taylor, M. L. (2006). Generation NeXt comes to college: Today's postmodern student. Retrieved February 1, 2007, from http://www.dccc.edu/teachlearn/Millennials/generation_next.html
- Taylor, R., & Bogdan, R. (1998). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: The search for meanings* (3rd Ed.). New York, NY: John Wiley & Sons.
- Tight, M. (2013). Students: Customers, clients, or pawns? *Higher Education Policy*, 26(3), 291-307.
- Tull, A., Kuk, L., & Dalpes, P. (2015). *Handbook for student affairs in community colleges*. Sterling, VA: Stylus.
- Wenger, E. (1998). *Communities of practice: Learning, meaning, and identity*. New York, NY: Cambridge University Press.

- Wenger, E., McDermott, R., & Snyder, W. (2002). *A guide to managing knowledge: Cultivating communities of practice*. Boston, MA: Harvard Business School Press.
- Williams, A., & Swail, W. S. (2005). *Is more better? The impact of postsecondary education on the economic and social well-being of American society*. Washington, DC: Educational Policy Institute, Inc.
- Winston, R. (2003). Stimulating and supporting student learning. In G. L. Kramer (Ed.), *Student academic services: An integrated approach* (pp. 3-26). San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.
- Yin, R. K. (2009). *Case study research: Design and methods* (4th ed.). Los Angeles, CA: Sage.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research: Design and methods* (5th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

APPENDIX A. INFORMED CONSENT DOCUMENT

Title of Study: How Front Line Student Services Staff Experience Transition from a Traditional Model of Student Services to an Integrated Model of Student Services

Investigators: Chris Bowser (BLS, MS. Ed)

This is a research study. Please take your time in deciding if you would like to participate. Please feel free to ask questions at any time.

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this comparative case study is to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. The goal of this research is to better understand the strategies and support systems front-line student services staff utilize during the transition in a higher education setting. You are being invited to participate in this study because you are a student services professional that has experienced the transition from a traditional to an integrated model of service.

DESCRIPTION OF PROCEDURES

If you agree to participate in this study, your participation will last for approximately two months. During the study you may expect the following study procedures to be followed:

- **You will be asked to complete a written reflection describing the transition you have experienced transitioning into the integrated student services model.**
- **You will be interviewed three times. Each interview will last approximately 20 minutes (60 minutes total) and consist of a number of open-ended questions. The first interview will focus on the experience of being notified about the transition to an integrated model of service. The second interview will focus on the strategies used by the college to set expectations for the new role and the trainings developed to transition into the model. The third interview will focus on how the transition experience has impacted the ability to serve students and relationships with co-workers and other areas of the college.**
- **I will observe you and your interaction with colleagues and students in the natural setting of the integrated student services center at your institution. The natural setting of the integrated student services center is a public location. I plan to observe the student flow into the space and how they check-in, how long they wait, and how they are served by the staff in the center. I will not identify your colleagues or any student using the services in that space. I will not sit in on meetings with students or other staff. No interaction with students or staff in this space will be used in the study. I plan to observe the space for approximately an hour and will take field notes of my observations.**
- **You will be assigned a pseudonym in all study records. The community college, participants, and any other persons identified in the observations, reflections, or interviews will be assigned pseudonyms.**
- **I will audio record our interview. Your name will not be included on the audio recordings and said recordings will be erased at the completion of the research project.**

- **You will be asked to review the transcript of the first interview and a report of emerging themes, as well as any other instances where you are portrayed prior to the second interview. This process will be repeated for the second and third interviews.**
- **The final report will be published in a dissertation through the School of Education in the College of Human Sciences program at Iowa State University and may inform additional studies to be conducted surrounding the topic of integrated student services.**
- **At any point during the interview process you may skip any question that you do not wish to answer or that makes you uncomfortable.**
- **You may also end the interview at any point, no questions asked.**

RISKS

There is a slight chance that you may feel uncomfortable talking about personal experiences. You will be asked your candid opinions about your experiences making the transition to an integrated model of student services at a community college. You may decline to answer any question that makes you feel uncomfortable.

BENEFITS

Research findings will assist college administrators planning to implement an integrated model of student services. Findings from this study may provide insight into the transition process and assist administrators with best practices to guide the transition.

COSTS AND COMPENSATION

You will not have any costs from participating in this study. You will be compensated for participating in this study. The rates will be \$5 gift card after the conclusion of each interview.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

CONFIDENTIALITY

Records identifying participants will be kept confidential to the extent permitted by applicable laws and regulations and will not be made publicly available. However, federal government regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board (a committee that reviews and approves human subject research studies) may inspect and/or copy your records for quality assurance and data analysis. These records may contain private information.

To ensure confidentiality to the extent permitted by law, the following measures will be taken: You will be assigned a pseudonym in all study records (except for this consent form). Your name will not be included on the audio recordings or transcriptions of the recordings; and the audio recordings will be erased at the completion of the research project, but the de-identified transcriptions may be retained. Records will be kept secure on a password protected computer in a locked office. Only the research team will have access to study records. Records that identify you will be destroyed as soon as legally possible; de-identified study data will be retained until the research is complete; it may be retained indefinitely for continued analysis.

All interviews will be held in a private room and transcripts will be returned to you per your wishes either via email or given directly to you in a sealed envelope.

If the results are published, your identity will remain confidential. Results will include information summarized across all of the participants who took part in the study; results will not be reported for individual persons or institutions. Any quotations I use in reported results will not include or be connected to any information that could identify you or your institution.

QUESTIONS OR PROBLEMS

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time during this study. For further information about the study contact Chris Bowser at 641-680-7650 or by email at chris.bowser@iastate.edu. To speak to the supervising faculty member contact Dr. Lorenzo Baber at 515-294-8374 or by email at ldbaber@iastate.edu. If you have any questions about the rights of research subjects or research-related injury, please contact the IRB Administrator, (515) 294-4566, IRB@iastate.edu, or Director, (515) 294-3115, Office for Responsible Research, Iowa State University, Ames, Iowa 50011.

PARTICIPANT SIGNATURE

Your signature indicates that you voluntarily agree to participate in this study, that the study has been explained to you, that you have been given the time to read the document and that your questions have been satisfactorily answered. You will receive a copy of the written informed consent prior to your participation in the study.

Participant's Name (printed) _____

(Participant's Signature)

(Date)

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW GUIDE

General Interview Guide – Interview 1

1. Start by describing your experience with the being notified that you would be transitioning to an integrated model of student services.
2. How did the experience affect you? What changes do you associate with the experience?
3. How did the experience affect significant others in your life?
4. What feelings were generated by the experience?
5. What thoughts stand out to you from the experience? Do you recall student reaction to the announcement of the change?
6. What changes in yourself were you aware of at the time?
7. Have you shared all that is significant with reference to the experience?

General Interview Guide – Interview 2

1. Can you explain the orientation/training process that you experienced while transitioning into your new role?
2. Do you believe that your institution was clear about the reason behind the change to a new model of service?
3. Do you feel like your institution provided you with the information about the duties/responsibilities of your new role, expectations and the supports that would be put in place for you to be successful in your new role?
4. Did you and your co-workers develop any strategies or systems of supporting each other/sharing information during the transition period?
5. Is there anything else that you would like to share about the process of beginning the transition to an integrated model of student service?

General Interview Guide – Interview 3

1. How would you describe/define the experience of transitioning from a traditional model (your old role) into an integrated model (new role) of student service?
2. How did your transition experience impact your ability to serve students in the new (integrated) model of service?
3. Can you describe the support systems that were put in place to ensure your success in your role in the new model of service?
4. Can you describe how the transition impacted your relationships with your co-workers, students and staff from other areas of the college?
5. Do you feel that your institution was aware of how the transition impacted your relationships with your co-workers, students, and staff from other areas of the college?
6. What support systems were put in place to assist with those relationship changes?
7. As you experienced this transition, can you describe any coping mechanisms that you and your co-workers utilized to assist in the process?
8. Do you feel that your institution provides continuing support that allows you to provide quality service to students within the new model?

APPENDIX C. PARTICIPANT COMMUNICATION

C-1. Study Site Recruiting E-mail

My name is Chris Bowser and I am the Executive Dean, Student Services at Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa. I am also working on my PhD in Education at Iowa State University. I have recently received approval by the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model at your institution to recruit potential participants for my study. They have shared your name as a staff member that has made the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. The study is free and voluntary. If you choose to be part of the study, you will be asked to write a reflection of your experience.

Once the reflection is complete, I would like to come to your campus and observe how the integrated student services staff interact with each other and serve the students at your institution. I have worked with the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model to gain permission to conduct this observation.

In addition, we will conduct three interviews that will last approximately one hour each. Our goal is to conduct the interviews on your campus. If this is not possible, we will conduct the interviews via Skype. If you decide to participate, you will receive a \$5 gift card after each interview.

Before we move forward, I want to inform you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Prior to taking any additional steps, I would like to ask if you have any questions about the information that has been shared in this e-mail communication. If so, please do not hesitate to reply to this e-mail or give me a call with your questions at (641) 680-7650.

If you would like to participate, please reply to this e-mail and let me know and I can begin to work with you and the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model at your institution to begin the process of the study.

Before we would begin with the study, I would like to provide you with an opportunity to review an informed consent document that provides a description of the procedures, risks and benefits associated with the study, how you will be compensated for your participation and your rights as a participant.

Once you have reviewed and signed the document, I will be working with the administrator responsible for the integrated student services operation to select dates for observation and interviews.

If you do not want to participate in the study, please reply to this e-mail and let me know. If that is the case, I want to thank you for your time and consideration.

Thanks again and have a great week!

C-2. Study Site Recruiting Call Script

“Hi. This is Chris Bowser, a PhD student with Iowa State University. I am conducting a study to examine how front-line student services staff make the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model. Through a reply on the ISSP list serve, I understand that your institution recently made the transition to an integrated model of student service and that you were a part of that transition. May I ask you a few questions about your transition experience?”

Yes No

⇒

⇒ If no, “I’m sorry to have bothered you. Thank you for your time.”

⇒ If yes, “Do you have 15 minutes for me to tell you about the study and ask you some yes-or-no questions about your experience?”

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. The study is free and voluntary. I am looking for participants that have made the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model, do you believe you have staff that meet this criteria?

Yes No

⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”

⇒ If yes, continue

If so, I would like to talk to you about identifying staff who would be willing to participate in the study. If you have staff who may be eligible, I would ask to contact them, share with them the details of the study and ask them to complete a personal reflection about their transition. Once the reflection is complete, I would like to come to your campus and observe how the integrated student services staff interact with each other and serve the students at your institution. Would you be willing to allow me observe the natural setting of the integrated student services center as a part of this study?

⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”

⇒ If yes, continue

Once the reflections have been complete, I would like to come to your campus to interview participants. We will conduct three interviews that will last approximately one hour each. Our goal is to conduct the interviews on your campus. If this is not possible, we will conduct the interviews via Skype. Each participant will receive a \$5 gift card after each interview. Would you be willing to share with me the names of staff who meet the eligibility criteria to see if they would be willing to participate?

Yes No

⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking to the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”

⇒ If yes, continue.

Before we move forward, I want to inform you that your staff’s participation in this study is completely voluntary and they may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If they decide

to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which they are otherwise entitled. Do you have any questions about your staff participating in the study?

Yes No

⇒ If yes, “What questions do you have?”

⇒ If no, continue.

Before we would begin with the study, I would like to provide your staff with an opportunity to review an informed consent document that provides a description of the procedures, risks and benefits associated with the study, how staff will be compensated for participation and rights as a participant. Can I e-mail you a copy of that document for your review?

Yes No

⇒ If yes, “Great, if you are willing to share your e-mail address, I will send it to you for your review.

⇒ If no, “Please let me know the best method to share that document with you.”

Once you have reviewed the document, we can work together to select dates for observation and interviews. Do you have any concerns about the process to select dates for observation and interviews?

Yes No

⇒ If yes, “Please let me know your concerns and I will do my best to address them”

⇒ If no, continue

“Do you have any additional questions?”

“Thank you so much for your time and interest. I will send you the consent form with more detailed information for you to review before we begin the study. I look forward to meeting you.”

“I will stay in touch with you as we schedule dates and times for observations and interviews.”

“Please contact me if you have any questions. My name is Chris Bowser and I can be reached at cbowser@iastate.edu or (641) 680-7650. Thank you again for your time and interest in this study.”
[end call].

C-3. Participant Recruiting Script

My name is Chris Bowser and I am the Executive Dean, Student Services at Indian Hills Community College in Ottumwa, Iowa. I am also working on my PhD in Education at Iowa State University. I have recently received approval by the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model at your institution to recruit potential participants for my study. They have shared your name as a staff member that has made the transition from a traditional model to an integrated model of student services.

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. The study is free and voluntary. If you choose to be part of the study, you will be asked to write a reflection of your experience.

Once the reflection is complete, I would like to come to your campus and observe how the integrated student services staff interact with each other and serve the students at your institution. I have worked with the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model to gain permission to conduct this observation.

In addition, we will conduct three interviews that will last approximately one hour each. Our goal is to conduct the interviews on your campus. If this is not possible, we will conduct the interviews via Skype. If you decide to participate, you will receive a \$5 gift card after each interview.

Before we move forward, I want to inform you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

Prior to taking any additional steps, I would like to ask if you have any questions about the information that has been shared in this e-mail communication. If so, please do not hesitate to reply to this e-mail or give me a call with your questions at (641) 680-7650.

If you would like to participate, please reply to this e-mail and let me know and I can begin to work with you and the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model at your institution to begin the process of the study.

Before we would begin with the study, I would like to provide you with an opportunity to review an informed consent document that provides a description of the procedures, risks and benefits associated with the study, how you will be compensated for your participation and your rights as a participant.

Once you have reviewed and signed the document, I will be working with the administrator responsible for the integrated student services operation to select dates for observation and interviews.

If you do not want to participate in the study, please reply to this e-mail and let me know. If that is the case, I want to thank you for your time and consideration.

Thanks again and have a great week!

C-4. Participant Recruiting Phone Script

“Hi. This is Chris Bowser, a PhD student with Iowa State University. I am conducting a study to examine how front-line student services staff make the transition from a traditional model of service to an integrated model. I have received your name from the administrator responsible for the integrated student services model at your institution. I understand that your institution recently made the transition to an integrated model of student service and that you were a part of that transition. May I ask you a few questions about your transition experience?”

Yes No

- ⇒ If no, “I’m sorry to have bothered you. Thank you for your time.”
- ⇒ If yes, “Do you have 15 minutes for me to tell you about the study and ask you some yes-or-no questions about your experience?”

The purpose of this study is to describe the experiences of front-line student services staff that have transitioned from a traditional model of student services to an integrated model. The study is free and voluntary. If you choose to be part of the study, you will be asked to write a reflection of your experience. Would you be willing to participate in writing a short reflection of your transition experience?

Yes No

- ⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”
- ⇒ If yes, continue

Once the reflection is complete, I would like to come to your campus and observe how the integrated student services staff interact with each other and serve the students at your institution. This observation has been approved by your institution. Would you be willing to participate in being observed in the natural setting of the integrated student services center as a part of this study?

- ⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”
- ⇒ If yes, continue

In addition, we will conduct three interviews that will last approximately one hour each. Our goal is to conduct the interviews on your campus. If this is not possible, we will conduct the interviews via Skype. If you decide to participate, you will receive a \$5 gift card after each interview. Would you be willing to participate in three short interviews about your transition experience?

Yes No

- ⇒ If no, “I want to thank you for taking to the time to speak to me. Have a nice day.”
- ⇒ If yes, continue.

Before we move forward, I want to inform you that your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you may refuse to participate or leave the study at any time. If you decide to not participate in the study or leave the study early, it will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled. Do you have any questions about participating in the study?

Yes No

- ⇒ If yes, “What questions do you have?”
- ⇒ If no, continue.

Before we would begin with the study, I would like to provide you with an opportunity to review an informed consent document that provides a description of the procedures, risks and benefits associated with the study, how you will be compensated for your participation and your rights as a participant. Can I e-mail you a copy of that document for your review?

Yes No

⇒ If yes, “Great, if you are willing to share your e-mail address, I will send it to you for your review.”

⇒ If no, “Please let me know the best method to share that document with you.”

Once you have reviewed and signed the document, I will be working with the administrator responsible for the integrated student services operation to select dates for observation and interviews. Do you have any concerns about working through the administrator to select dates?

Yes No

⇒ If yes, “Please let me know your concerns and I will do my best to address them”

⇒ If no, continue

“Do you have any additional questions?”

“Thank you so much for your time and interest. I will send you a consent form with more detailed information for you to review before we begin the study. I look forward to meeting you.”

“I will stay in touch with you and the administrator responsible for the integrated student services center as we schedule dates and times for observations and interviews.”

“Please contact me if you have any questions. My name is Chris Bowser and I can be reached at cbowser@iastate.edu or (641) 680-7650. Thank you again for your time and interest in this study.”

[end call].

APPENDIX D. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

IOWA STATE UNIVERSITY
OF SCIENCE AND TECHNOLOGY

Institutional Review Board
Office for Responsible Research
Vice President for Research
2420 Lincoln Way, Suite 202
Ames, Iowa 50014
515-294-4566

Date: 3/2/2017

To: Christopher David Bowser
214 Oakwood Ave.
Ottumwa, IA 52501

CC: Dr. Lorenzo Baber
2666D Lagomar
Dr. Sharon Drake
1620E Lagomarcino

From: Office for Responsible Research

Title: How Front Line Student Services Staff Experience Transition from a Traditional Model of Student Services to an Integrated Model of Student Services

IRB ID: 17-031

Approval Date: 3/1/2017 **Date for Continuing Review:** 2/28/2018

Submission Type: New **Review Type:** Expedited

The project referenced above has received approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at Iowa State University according to the dates shown above. Please refer to the IRB ID number shown above in all correspondence regarding this study.

To ensure compliance with federal regulations (45 CFR 46 & 21 CFR 56), please be sure to:

- **Use only the approved study materials** in your research, including the recruitment materials and informed consent documents that have the IRB approval stamp.
- **Retain signed informed consent documents for 3 years after the close of the study**, when documented consent is required.
- **Obtain IRB approval prior to implementing any changes** to the study by submitting a Modification Form for Non-Exempt Research or Amendment for Personnel Changes form, as necessary.
- **Immediately inform the IRB of (1) all serious and/or unexpected adverse experiences** involving risks to subjects or others; and (2) **any other unanticipated problems** involving risks to subjects or others.
- **Stop all research activity if IRB approval lapses**, unless continuation is necessary to prevent harm to research participants. Research activity can resume once IRB approval is reestablished.
- **Complete a new continuing review form** at least three to four weeks prior to the **date for continuing review** as noted above to provide sufficient time for the IRB to review and approve continuation of the study. We will send a courtesy reminder as this date approaches.

Please be aware that IRB approval means that you have met the requirements of federal regulations and ISU policies governing human subjects research. **Approval from other entities may also be needed.** For example, access to data from private records (e.g. student, medical, or employment records, etc.) that are protected by FERPA, HIPAA, or other confidentiality policies requires permission from the holders of those records. Similarly, for research conducted in institutions other than ISU (e.g., schools, other colleges or universities, medical facilities, companies, etc.), investigators must obtain permission from the institution(s) as required by their policies. **IRB approval in no way implies or guarantees that permission from these other entities will be granted.**

Upon completion of the project, please submit a Project Closure Form to the Office for Responsible Research, 202 Kingland, to officially close the project.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if you have questions or concerns at 515-294-4566 or IRB@iastate.edu.